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Use of Specific Praise with Students with Mild to Moderate Disabilities in an After School
Program

Jamie Gandara

Action Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Masters of
Arts in Education

California State University, Monterey Bay

May 2015

SPECIFIC PRAISE WITH STUDENTS WITH MILD TO MODERATE DISABILITIES

Use of Specific Praise with Students with Mild to Moderate Disabilities in an After School Program

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SPECIFIC PRAISE WITH STUDENTS WITH MILD TO MODERATE DISABILITIES

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the many people who have greatly supported me throughout this endeavor of earning my Master's Degree in Education. First, without my husband this would not have been achieved. He is the person who made me believe that this was something that I could actually accomplish. My husband believes in me more than I believe in myself. Throughout the past few years he has always been there to give me a push to continue on when I felt like quitting. He has also been there to do the simple, but very important things as well, like doing dishes and cooking when I needed to stay up typing. Also, he has understood that we can't go out because I need to work. The support I have received from him is invaluable.

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Abstract

The purpose this research is to show that with sufficient training in behavior specific praise teachers will be able to increase their use of specific praise with all students, including students with mild to moderate disabilities. Many teachers and school staff do not have adequate training and experiences with using behavior specific praise with students who have mild to moderate disabilities. (Germer, Kaplan, Grioux, Markham, Markham, Ferris, Oaks, and Lane, 2011) The research questions in this study are: Does specific praise and positive reinforcement help shape the behavior of students who have mild to moderate special education needs in an after school setting? What are the effects of specific praise and positive reinforcement on students who have mild to moderate special education needs in the after school education environment? Does sharing strategies to promote the use of praise with an after school program teacher increase consistent application for students with mild to moderate behavior? The study trained a second grade teacher to increase her use of specific praise in an after school classroom setting. The on-task behavior of the four focus students with mild to moderate disabilities were observed to see if their on-task behavior increased as a result of the teacher training. The results showed that increased teacher training does encourage teachers to use more praise in the classroom especially with students who have mild to moderate disabilities. The results also showed that for the majority of students, behavior specific praise helped them to increase their on-task behavior in class.

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CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

Students with mild to moderate disabilities often display off task behaviors that are sometimes detrimental to peers, educators, school staff and themselves. These students need more support in shaping the off task behavior than students who do not have disabilities in order to participate meaningfully in general education settings. Students with disabilities need to show more on task behaviors in the school environment. Specific praise is one type of positive reinforcement that can be used to shape the behavior of a student with disabilities. There is a need to show that praise and positive reinforcement are beneficial and effective in shaping the behavior of students with mild to moderate disabilities in the general education setting (Germer, Kaplan, Giroux, Markham, Markham, Ferris, Oaks, and Lane, 2011).

Also, there is a need for better teacher training in the use of specific praise and positive reinforcement with a focus on students with disabilities in the general education classroom settings. Unfortunately, many teachers have not had the required training in the many uses of specific praise and positive reinforcement. Because of this they may have tried to use praise in their classrooms, but were unsuccessful. Once teachers are properly trained and have success with specific praise it is more likely that they will be more willing to use it in their classroom especially with students with disabilities. Research has shown that teacher training and coaching does increase the amount of praise that is given in the classroom (Mesa, J., Lewis-Palmer, T., & Reinke, W. 2005). The fundamental purpose of this research project is to illustrate that with improved teacher training and coaching regarding the use of specific praise with students with mild to moderate disabilities there will be an increase on task behavior mitigation the need for negative consequences, referrals, or dismissals from a positive learning environment.

Problem Statement

Students need a positive environment where specific praise is used so that they can grow and become students who have positive on task behaviors (Chalk and Bizo, 2004). In an environment that lacks praise and positive reinforcement on task behavior can be difficult for children with mild to moderate disabilities to achieve. General education teachers need more support and training in their use of specific praise and positive reinforcement with students with mild to moderate disabilities in the general education setting. Teachers need to use an increased amount of specific praise and positive reinforcement such as “I like the ways you solved the problem Fernando” “Thank you for listening when I talk Marissa” “You followed the direction I gave you perfectly Angela-great!” in order to increase the amount of on task behaviors in students with disabilities. Teachers may use specific praise inconsistently and/or in a limited amount with students with mild to moderate disabilities and therefore have had limited or varied success in using specific praise in their classrooms. Because of limited success a teacher may have given up on using specific praise almost entirely. Teachers may use positive or negative punishment to shape students’ behavior, because they have had more success with shaping students’ behavior through these methods and they believe it is a more effective method for increasing a students’ on task behavior.

Special education students respond better, when praise and positive reinforcement are used, than punishments or negative reinforcements. (Germer, Kaplan, Giroux, Markham, Markham, Ferris, Oaks, and Lane, 2011) Fullerton, E., Conroy, & Correa (2009) also point out that the special education students in the general education setting need positive reinforcement and praise to facilitate their success in the general education setting and limit maladaptive behaviors. Since most general education teachers’ instruction is group oriented students with

mild to moderate disabilities must comply with the generic classroom management procedures in place by an individual teacher or by a school wide policy. However, most students with mild to moderate disabilities need close monitoring to ensure they are successful within a general education setting. Close monitoring for students with mild to moderate disabilities usually implies behavioral management along with very specific praise and encouragement to increase normative general education classroom behavior. The research over the years clearly indicates that there is a need for greater training in the consistent use of specific praise for students with mild to moderate disabilities by general education teachers (Duchaine, Jolivet, and Fredrick, 2011). More specifically, research geared toward training individual general education teachers in the use of behavioral methods to ensure normative classroom behaviors will help inform the field with practical suggestions in order to promote on task behaviors as well as positive peer to peer and peer to adult interaction for students with mild to moderate disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

There are several different reasons for conducting this type of study with a focus on specific praise. One purpose of this study is to determine if specific praise is effective in shaping students' behavior to show more on task behaviors in students who have mild to moderate special needs in a general education setting. Specific praise includes statements such as: "Sarah you did a great job on that math problem" "I like the way you remembered to put a capital and a period in your sentence, Billy" "John, you brought all your homework again, you are becoming a very responsible student." Another purpose of this study is to find and create an easy way for general education teachers to implement positive reinforcement and specific praise consistently and at an appropriate amount into a general education class where there are several students who have mild to moderate special needs in the general education class setting (Duchaine, E.L.,

Jolivete, K., & Fredrick, L.D. 2011). Another purpose of this study is to find out if specific praise works well with students who have special needs if so then it should also work well in shaping the behavior of students who do not have special needs. Since the study will be done in the general education setting, general education students will also receive increased amounts of praise from their teacher as well. The study will show if specific praise works in shaping the behavior general education students as well. Lastly, another important purpose of this study is to inform other educators and school staff about the powerfulness of praise and positive reinforcement when shaping a student behavior. This is truly the purpose of this study, which is to show teachers and school staff that praise and positive reinforcement if used correctly is highly effective in increasing the on task behavior of all students. Teachers and staff need to understand that praise when used consistently and effectively really does help students with mild to moderate disabilities show more on task behaviors and it is a much more effective behavior management technique than using punishments.

Research Questions

I have proposed the following research questions:

1. Does specific praise and positive reinforcement help shape the behavior of students who have mild to moderate special education needs in an after school setting?
2. What are the effects of specific praise and positive reinforcement on students who have mild to moderate special education needs in the after school education environment?
3. Does sharing strategies to promote the use of praise with an after school program teacher increase consistent application for students with mild to moderate behavior?
4. Does sharing strategies to promote the use of praise with an after school program teacher increase on task behavior for students with mild to moderate disabilities?

Theoretical Model

The focus of the research being conducted is related to how individuals respond to specific praise in the afterschool setting. This is directly related to several theories that have been researched in relationship to how people are motivated by different needs, are reinforced by external and internal factors, how people respond to different types of reinforcement, and how students develop socially in the school setting. There are two theories that deal with these issues: motivational theory developed by Abraham Maslow and social learning theory developed by Albert Bandura. John Dewey's educational philosophy regarding the importance of social interaction as a mainstay of public education provides a needed perspective for the inclusion of students with mild to moderate disabilities in general education settings.

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory lends itself directly to this line of research. A central feature of his theory focuses on how people respond to different types of consequences and incentives that occur in their daily lives. He states that behavior is regulated by its consequences and actions that have a positive effect are often repeated by individuals. Actions that have a negative effect, individuals will no longer find useful or worth doing, so the individual will discontinue that action (Bandura, 1977). In his theory he also focuses on different types of incentives that motivate people to behave in a certain way. Social Learning Theory investigates the difference between external reinforcement and internal reinforcement. External reinforcement is reinforcement that comes from outside one's own body and thinking. It is a positive incentive that can be earned for doing a certain behavior. Internal reinforcement comes from within a person. It is when person regulates their actions because they want to and not because they are going to earn an incentive (Bandura, 1977). For the purpose of this study external reinforcement will be focused on since specific praise is an external reinforcement.

Bandura gave the example of teachers at a school who unknowingly were placing too much positive external reinforcement on the mal adaptive behaviors of a student and not enough positive external reinforcement on prosocial behaviors that the students showed. Once the teachers placed no positive reinforcement on the negative behaviors and a great amount of reinforcement on the student's positive behaviors, the student was able to almost eliminate all the negative behaviors (Bandura, 1977). There are several different types of external incentives that can be given. The different types of incentives that can be given are primary, sensory, monetary, activity, social, status and power incentives. The incentive that is related the most to specific praise as reinforcement is social incentives. Social incentives are motivated by the approval of others. People desire the approval of others, therefore approval of others becomes a positive consequence and disapproval becomes a negative consequence (Bandura, 1986). People will behave in a way to gain the approval of others and avoid behaviors that gain disapproval. Because of this giving more praise to students will help to shape their behavior if gaining the approval of others is a motivating factor for the students in the class.

Maslow's (1954) motivation theory focuses on how people are motivated to take different action to meet their many needs. Maslow states that people are motivated to first meet their basic needs first. Hunger and thirst are basic needs. If a person is very hungry or thirsty they will only focus on finding food or water and not any other higher needs. Once basic needs have been met other needs will emerge in a hierarchical order. The next need that needs to be met is safety. Children crave a need for routine because it fills their need for safety. Other needs include: belongingness and love, self-esteem, knowing, self-actualization, and aesthetic needs (Maslow, 1954). People are generally motivated to fill these needs and as one need is filled another one will arise. Maslow also states that people are also motivated by external factors and

the action a person takes may not be directly related to their immediate needs. He also stated that gratification of a need makes the need subside with practice or rewards, such as praise and reinforcement (Maslow, 1954). This shows that the use of praise as an external reinforcement can satisfy the needs of students and help to change their behavior. Maslow also stated that when children have all their needs met they are happy and healthy. They actually enjoy learning and gaining new skills (Maslow, 1968). Motivation theory shows that people are motivated by different needs and when those needs are met they are able to grow and function well.

Social learning theory and motivational theory are the underpinnings of the current research. However, it must be noted that Dewey (Dewey, 1916) states that learning can take place in both informal and formal ways. Informal learning occurs when a person interacts with others and gains new information simply by having new experiences. Formal learning occurs when a person has to work at learning a new task and the person is aware that they are trying to learn a new task (Dewey, 1916). Dewey also stated that the school setting is looked at as an environment where social learning occurs. Students learn general skills by participating in activities that have been presented, but also they gain social skills and group customs by interacting in a group environment (Dewey, 1916). Lastly, Dewey points out that a student needs to have a direction in their education. This is especially important for young students. Students need to be guided gain new skills and to have good social skills. Students will do this through participating in activities with other students. Through group participation students will naturally gain better social skills and group norms (Dewey, 1916). This theory shows that the school environment is a place where social behavior can be shaped through interaction with others and participating in various activities.

These theories are the basis for the research being conducted. Social Learning Theory explains how people respond to different types of reinforcement. Motivation Theory describes the reasons why people are motivated to take different actions. Education Theory explains how people learn and acquire social skills in a school environment.

Researcher Background

I have been in education for the past eight years. For the first Five of those years I was teaching in the general education classroom setting with fourth grade students. During the first four of those years, I taught the fourth grade intervention class at the school where I was working. I worked with many students who were struggling with all aspects of Language Art and math. Also, many of the students I worked with were students who were identified to have special needs. There were also many English Language learners in the classes that I taught. During this time I learned that I loved working with students who had challenges with learning and behavior. I loved finding ways to help them to achieve more academically than anyone or they themselves thought they could. I was also able to create students who behaved better as well. This is when I decided to move to work with students who were in the special education population of students. For the past three years, I have been working with students in the special day class setting who are at the fourth and fifth grade level. These students have many disabilities that include: learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, speech disabilities, ADHD and other health impaired. About half of the students in my special day class are also English Language Learners.

In both these settings I have found that being positive and using a great amount of encouragement, really help students to remain on task when they are in the general education setting and achieve more academically. Praise is important to helping a classroom run well

because it meets the basic needs of students in the classroom (Maslow, 1954). It also builds a great connection between the student and teacher. Focusing on what the students are doing right in a world where there are so many things that the student is doing wrong helps to build self-esteem and create a positive atmosphere where students want to learn, complete more assignments, and behave well in the classroom. It also helps to socialize students into having more positive behavior and interactions with others (Dewey, 1916). People and students are often motivated to gain the approval of others; therefore praise can be used as a motivational tool (Bandura, 1968).

I am a believer in praise and positive reinforcement. It has worked well in helping me to create a positive classroom environment where all students are able to behave well and achieve academically. But not all teachers use praise as often as I have or, have not had the success that I have had with using praise in the classroom, which is why I want to do this study. To show that praise is truly powerful and it helps students to behave much better and achieve more than when teachers focus more on negative behaviors that a student may show.

Definition of Terms

- Behavior specific praise- praise statement that is given within five seconds of a child showing a desirable behavior that uses the student's name, a positive statement, and an explanation of what the student did correctly.
- On task behavior- any behavior that completes or works toward a task that has been given for the student to complete. Example: a teacher is giving a lesson the student is to be looking at and listening to the teacher.
- Off task behavior- any behavior that interrupts or hinders the class or the student from completing a task that has been assigned or a direction that has been given.

- General education setting- educational setting where the majority of the students do not have special needs.
- Special education setting-setting separate from the general education setting where those students in the population all have some sort of identified disability.
- Students-Third, fourth and fifth grade aged children in an afterschool educational setting who are general education students and special education students.
- General education students-students who do not have any type of disability. They are typical for their age and grade.
- Special education students-students who have some sort of identified disability that affects their ability to learn.
- ELL-English Language Learner-a student who is learning English. These students come from homes that speak a language other than English for the majority of the time.
- Motivational Theory- Theory created by Maslow that shows how people are motivated to take certain actions to meet their different needs.
- Education Theory- Theory created by Dewey that shows how people learn new skills in formal and informal settings and gain social skills through interactions with others.
- Social Learning Theory- Theory created by Bandura that shows how people respond to different types of consequences and these responses shape a person's behavior.

Summary

This research project will take a closer look at how specific praise is used with students with mild to moderate disabilities in the after school. It will investigate the effectiveness of increased teacher training in the use of praise on students with mild to moderate disabilities. The research will answer the question, if the use of specific praise is increased with students with

mild to moderate disabilities; will the amount of on task behavior the student shows increase as well?

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Many students in elementary school have trouble maintaining on-task behaviors, but students with special needs are one group of students who have a difficult time remaining on-task in the classroom. (Germer, et al., 2011). Students with mild to moderate disabilities often have off task behaviors that are sometimes detrimental to other students, educators, school staff and themselves. These students need more support in shaping their on task behaviors in the school environment. Specific praise and tangible positive reinforcement has been shown to be an effective strategy in increasing on-task and desirable behaviors in students who have disabilities. This study will target and answer the following questions: Does specific praise and positive reinforcement help shape the behavior of students who have mild to moderate special education needs in an after school setting? What are the effects of specific praise and positive reinforcement on students who have mild to moderate special education needs in the special needs in the after school education environment?

Also, teachers have had insufficient training in the area of specific praise (Duchaine, Jolivet, and Fredrick, 2011). Because of this, many teachers fail to use specific praise effectively and consistently in their classrooms with general education students and students with disabilities. Teachers need better training and feed back to increase the amounts of specific praise that is used in the classroom. This will ultimately lead to more on task behavior for all students, but especially students with disabilities in the general education setting. This study will also investigate the following questions related to teacher training and feedback: Does specific praise and positive reinforcement help shape the behavior of students who have mild to moderate special education needs in an after school setting? What are the effects of specific praise and

positive reinforcement on students who have mild to moderate special education needs in the after school education environment? Does sharing strategies to promote the use of praise with an after school program teacher increase consistent application for students with mild to moderate behavior? Does sharing strategies to promote the use of praise with an after school program teacher increase on task behavior for students with mild to moderate disabilities?

There were several databases that were utilized to find article and studies that were appropriated for this literature review. The databases that were searched were ERIC, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The following terms were used to help locate specific articles that would be beneficial to this literature review: (a) praise, (b) positive reinforcement, (c) elementary school, (d) students, (e) disabilities, (f)ADHD and (G)behavior. These terms were used together or alone to help locate appropriate articles.

This topic had many articles available for review. Studies that were included if: (a) the participants were of pre-school age or elementary school age, (b) students with disabilities were included in the study even if the study was done in the general education setting and (c) the purpose of the study was to show the effects of praise and how it increased students desirable behaviors. Studies that were excluded were studies that: (a) the participants of the study were adults, (b) the study did not take place in a school setting.

Praise and Positive Reinforcement

Praise and positive reinforcement have been used in many different school settings and has been shown to increase appropriate behaviors in students of all ages and abilities. Wheatley, et al. (2009) showed how the use of a praise note system increased desirable behavior in all types of students in the lunchroom setting. Wheatley, et al. (2009) discussed the importance of specific praise when shaping a student's behavior in common areas in a school setting specifically the

elementary school cafeteria during lunch time for first through fifth graders. Specific praise and praise notes were given to students who demonstrated appropriate behaviors including sitting, walking, and not littering. The student's would turn these notes into the office where they would receive more verbal praise and be entered into a drawing for the end of the day. The authors found that after using the specific praise and praise notes, during lunchtime littering decreased by 96%, inappropriate sitting decreased by 65%, and running decreased by 75%. Verbal praise combined with a tangible reinforce was successful in shaping students behavior. This shows that even in an unstructured setting like the lunch room where the student to supervisor ratio is much higher than in the classroom specific praise is beneficial to shaping students behavior. If praise is able to improve student behavior in the lunch room, then the same sort of procedure would also be effective in shaping student behavior in the classroom.

Another example of the effects of praise on children's behavior is from Fullerton, Conroy, & Correa (2009), who discussed the effects of specific praise on young children who are at risk for behavioral disorders in their future. The authors noted it is important for these types of children to have positive behavior skills before they go to elementary school so that they can have a positive experience in the future. The study was done to see if young children who have behavioral challenges would respond to specific verbal praise as a strategy to increase the students' compliance and engagement behaviors. When students were either compliant or engaged in an activity as directed the students were given verbal praise by their teachers. Teachers in this study were also trained in specific praise and encouraged to use more praise with their students. The results indicated that teachers were able to increase their amount of praise and as a result compliant behaviors and engagement behaviors also increased from 40% and 50% the student participants. Just as in the lunch room, this research showed that if specific praise

can increase the appropriate behaviors in young children at risk for behavioral disorders, then it can also increase the appropriate behaviors for students with mild to moderate disabilities.

A third example of using praise in the classroom was examined in a study that was completed by Germer et al. (2011). The researchers studied a second grade boy who had been diagnosed with ADHD and had at one point been taking medication, but at the time of the study was not on medication. He attended a school where a school wide positive behavior intervention system (PBIS) had been put in place, and he had been identified as one of the students who needed more support so that he could maintain on-task behavior in the classroom. During the study several interventions were given to the boy. He was given a chart on his desk to let the teacher know when he needed to complete a task. When he would use the chart correctly the teacher would praise the boy and let him have a short break to get a drink of water. He would also receive PBIS tickets which was part of the school wide behavior system accompanied by praise when he displayed on-task behavior. The teacher also made an effort to make sure that the boy received specific praise at least once every five minutes, if he had shown on-task behavior. If the boy displayed off-task behavior he was ignored and given no attention for displaying any behaviors that the teacher did not want to see in the classroom. The researchers found that before the boy was given more specific praise, the boy displayed on-task behavior 34% of the time. After the intervention the boy displayed on-task behavior 63% of the time and over the course of time he was able to improve and maintain his on-task behavior 79% of the time. Praise and positive reinforcement are vital to changing a student's behavior in the classroom. Research shows that specific verbal praise works across students, including students with disabilities.

The research has shown that praise statements increase student's positive classroom behaviors in all types of students. Specific praise is a type of positive reinforcement which will if used correctly increase the likelihood of a student showing appropriate behavior in the future. If a teacher has a student with challenging behaviors it would be a benefit to the student for the teacher to use praise and positive reinforcement to change the student's behavior from off task behaviors to behaviors that are more acceptable for the classroom and school setting (Germer, et al. 2011).

Types of Praise

Different types of praise have been used to increase a student's on task classroom behaviors. Specific praise has been shown to be the most effective type of praise when increasing on task behavior in elementary school aged students. Specific praise is when a teacher tells a student that they have done a good job at something and why or how the student has done a good job. Non behavior specific positive praise only informs the student that they did something right and good, but not what or how the student did a good job.

Behavior specific praise versus non-behavior specific praise

Chalk and Bizo (2004) studied the difference between students' on-task behavior when behavior specific praise is given versus when non behavior specific positive praise is given. For the study four fourth grade classes were analyzed. Two of the classroom teachers used only non-behavior specific praise and the other two classroom teachers used behavior specific praise. Observations of the classrooms were done before any interventions and three times after the interventions took place. Observations were also conducted during independent, group work, and whole group activities. During the study period two teachers were given specific instruction to use specific praise and link praise to any particular academic skill or behavior the student had

shown. The other two teachers were told to use non-behavior specific positive praise, but were given no instruction to link praise to any academic skill or behavior. All teachers were required to keep a tally chart to track how often they were using either type of praise in their classroom. The researchers observed then amount of praise given by the teacher and the amount of off task behavior that was being displayed in their classrooms by their students. After the study was completed the authors found that on-task behaviors for all for classrooms increased, but the classrooms that used behavior specific praise increased the most. Before the intervention began there was an average of 72% on-task behavior between all four classes. After praise was given, the non-behavior specific positive praise classrooms had on-task behaviors increased to 87%, which is an improvement from before the interventions. The behavior specific praise classrooms had an on-task behavior rate of 96%, which is a greater increase than in the positive praise classrooms. This shows that the type of praise that is used in a classroom is very important to increase a student's on-task behavior. Since praise also works with students with disabilities it is important to remember the using behavior specific praise will be more effective than using non-behavior specific praise.

Moffat, T. K., (2011) researched the effects of using behavior specific praise on a child with aggressive behavior. The researcher wanted to show that behavior specific praise truly does have a positive effect on the behavior of children with aggressive behaviors. The researcher worked with a teacher at an early childhood center who has had more than twenty years working with young children. The student was a three and a half year old boy who had displayed aggressive behavior such as: punching, pushing, hitting, and biting. The teacher was given examples of behavior specific praise to use and the types of reprimands not to use. She was also given strategies how to increase her use of behavior specific praise. After each session the

teacher was given feedback about how much and how many reprimands were used with the student. The teacher was observed during a daily twenty minute session for a period of three weeks. The number of reprimands that were given by the teacher went from three at baseline to zero after intervention. The number of behavior specific praise statements given by the teacher went from zero before intervention to four per session after intervention. The number of aggressive behaviors shown by the student went from two before intervention to zero after intervention. For the student the number of pro-social behaviors went from zero before intervention to six after intervention. With increased use of behavior specific praise the student was able to almost eliminate any aggressive behavior and increase the number of pro-social behaviors. Behavior specific praise is an effective tool for shaping a student's behavior for the better.

Madsen, C.H., Becker, W.C., and Thomas, D.R. (1968) also studied the effects of using praise with early elementary students, kindergarten and first grade, who has trouble remaining on task in the classroom. The teachers were trained in posting rules, ignoring inappropriate behavior, and then finally praising appropriate behavior. The teachers implemented each strategy one at a time. The only time the researcher found a real significant change in student behavior was when the teachers ignored inappropriate behaviors and praised appropriate behaviors. The students were able to dramatically increase the amount of on task and appropriate behaviors because of the praise statements that they were being given from their teachers.

Behavior specific praise combined with positive natural consequences

Another type of praise that can be given is behavior specific praise with a description of a positive natural consequence attached given after the praise. Novak and Hammond (2001)

analyzed the effectiveness of self-reinforcement and praise with a description of a positive natural consequence within a token economy. In their study the researchers worked with a fourth grade classroom where they created a token economy. They wanted to see if a token economy with praise would increase number of math problems a student would complete. There were four groups in the study. One group just got tokens, which were pieces of paper that were signed by the teacher when the student completed a problem. In another group the students got to administer their own tokens by signing their own papers after completing a problem. A third group received tokens and praise statements that included positive natural consequences, like “You’re going to get an A, from all your hard work, good job”. A fourth group was allowed to give their own tokens and was given verbal praise statements that included positive natural consequences. In all groups, the number of problems that were completed dramatically increased. The group that increased the most was the group that was given tokens and praise with positive natural consequence statements attached to them. Another interesting result was that the students who had the combination of self-reinforcement and praise statements maintained completing the most problems even after the token economy had been removed. This study shows that praise with the inclusion of statements to show natural consequences increase students problem solving behavior.

The research has shown that the type of praise that is used plays an important role in changing a student’s behavior. Behavior specific praise increases student on-task behavior rate compared to non-behavior specific praise statements (Chalk et al. 2004). Also, behavior specific praise combined with statements of positive outcomes and consequences that will happen has shown to additionally increase on task behaviors in students even more than the behavior specific praise (Novak et al. 2001). Teachers should make sure to use behavior specific praise in their

classrooms, because it is more effective in changing behavior than non-specific praise statements. Students with mild to moderate disabilities in the general education setting need positive reinforcement and praise to support their ability to display on task behaviors and reduce the number of off task behaviors that are shown.

Teacher Training and Feedback

It is also important for teachers to have appropriate training and feedback in regard to their use of praise in the classroom setting. Since teachers are the people who will be in contact with students the most during lessons it is vital for teachers to understand when and how to use praise. This is why comprehensive training is so important to using praise effectively in the classroom. Feedback is another tool that can be used to increase teachers' use of praise in their classrooms. Feedback helps teachers to understand how often they are using praise and how praise affects their students' behaviors in their classrooms.

Teacher feedback

Mesa, Lewis-Palmer, and Reinke (2005) evaluated the effectiveness of providing teachers with visual graphs of their use of praise verses their students' disruptive behavior. The authors wanted to know if teachers were given visual feedback, would the teacher's rate of praise increase. One second grade classroom was used where two teachers were co-teaching the classroom. One teacher taught in the mornings and one teacher taught in the afternoons. Both teachers were observed daily. For the first seven days no feedback was given. Then for the next 35 days each teacher was given a visual graph of her amount of praise and the amount of students' disruptive behavior. After the first intervention was applied which was just training both teachers did not increase their rates of praise. During the second week of observations when the teachers were shown graphs of their rates of praise compared to student behavior both

teachers started to use praise more and more. They went from using praise less than one time per min. (0.88 times per minute) to more the two times per minute (2.12 times per minute). As the amount of teacher praise increased the students' on task behaviors greatly increased while disruptive behaviors dramatically decreased. Since the only intervention was to show teachers line graphs of their daily use of praise it can be said that visual feedback was effective in increasing the amount of praise the teachers used in the classroom. Feedback is very important in improving teacher's use of praise, because it can show them how praise decreases the amount of off-task behaviors that happen in the classroom.

Sutherland, K.S., Wehby, J.H., & Copeland, S.R (2000) also researched the effects of behavior specific praise and teacher feedback. Sutherland wanted to further investigate the use of behavior specific praise with students with Emotional Behavior Disorder. In the study, one teacher working with nine students in a fifth grade classroom for students with Emotional Behavior Disorder was analyzed. Observations were done during social skills time. Students worked in whole group discussions, small group roles plays, and individual work. The teacher was given several interventions to increase the amount of praise that he used in the classroom. The teacher was told about the benefits of behavior specific praise and given examples of behavior specific praise. Then the teacher created a goal to use six behavior specific praise statements during each class session. Prior to each class the teacher was reminded of his goal to give at least six behavior-specific praise statements. Verbal feedback was also given to the teacher after each class session. The feedback included the amount of behavior specific praise statements that were used and the amount of on task behaviors that the students showed. The teacher was able to increase his amount of behavior specific praise from 1.7 statements per class session to 7.8 statements per class session. Because of the increased praise statements, the

students' on task behavior increased from only 48.7% of the time, to 85.6% of the time. Here is an example of behavior specific praise working well to increase the on task behavior of students with Emotional Behavior Disorder. It also shows that including the teacher in creating a goal for the amount of praise used, providing the teacher with daily feedback about their praise use, and giving the teacher information on daily student on task behavior, helps to increase the amount of teacher praise in the classroom.

Reinke, M., Lewis-Palmer, T., and Merrell, K. (2008) used a consultation model called the Classroom Check-Up which followed the typical consultation model where there is a classroom assessment, feedback from the initial classroom assessment, the consultant gave options that will help solve any classroom problems, the teacher chose their desired intervention, and teacher implemented the strategies that were chosen. The researchers chose this model as a way to address behavior management challenges in the classroom. The researchers worked with four second grade classroom teachers in a general education setting. Teachers were met with by the researchers and chose interventions to use in their classrooms. Each teacher chose between one and five interventions mostly centered on increasing the number of behavior specific praise statements during the class period. For the first phase of the study, each teacher was to self-monitor their performance by putting a checkmark next to each goal that they met for the day. The teachers were observed during this period. During the second phase of the study, the researchers met with the teachers at the end of each session and provided the teachers with a visual feedback graph showing the amount of use of praise verses the amount of disruptive behaviors from the students. The study found that teachers increased their amounts of praise use during the visual feedback phase as opposed the self-monitoring phase. Also, during the visual feedback phase, student disruptions decreased. Visual teacher feedback is a powerful tool in

increasing teacher use of praise. When teachers can see the positive effects of using praise on the students in their classroom, they choose to use it more often.

Teacher coaching

Teacher coaching is important to increasing a teachers' use of praise. Duchaine, Jolivet, and Fredrick (2011) researched the effects of teacher coaching in the areas of specific praise and the amounts of praise given. The researchers used three high school math classroom teachers who taught a remedial math class where students were given an extra chance to earn their math credit for graduation. In each of the classes there were typical students and students with high incidence disabilities. The teachers were trained in a 45 minute presentation which taught the teachers about the importance of coaching, how and when to use behavior specific praise statements, and they were given an opportunity to set a goal for themselves as to how many behavior specific praise statements they wanted to use during their class sessions with students. Throughout the study 15 minute observations were done. Before every third observation the researchers met with the teachers for a short coaching session. During the short coaching session the researcher reminded the teacher of their goal, gave more examples of specific praise, and let the teacher ask questions. During the observation sessions the researchers were looking for how often the teachers used specific praise with their students and the amount of on task behavior that the students displayed. After the observation the observer would leave written feedback on the amount of praise given and the type of praise that was given.

The teachers were able to increase their specific praise statements from none to an average of seven for every fifteen minute observation period. On task behavior increased in only one class. The researchers noted the students who received the praise were not necessarily the same students who were being monitored as showing on task behavior. Still, this study showed

that teaching training is very important to increasing the amount and quality of specific praise that is given in a classroom.

Another example of teacher coaching was examined by Kalis, T.M., Vannest, K.J., and Parker, R. The researchers analyzed a first year teacher working in a class for students with Emotional Behavior Disorder in grades nine to eleven. Each class that was observed has five students, one paraprofessional, and one classroom teacher. The teacher was given a twenty minute training/coaching session on the differences between behavior specific praise and non-behavior specific praise and how to use behavior specific praise in the classroom. The teacher was trained how to keep track of the amounts of praise that she gave in the classroom. The teacher was given a hand counter which she would click each time she gave a praise statement. After ten minutes of teaching the teacher would record the number on the hand counter and then continue the lesson and clicking her hand counter for the rest of the lesson. She would then record her total praise statements for the entire lesson. Also, before each class session the teacher was given verbal prompts to use praise and examples of behavior specific praise. During the lessons the observer would also keep track of the praise statements that were given, but the researcher recoded the number of behavior specific praise statements versus non-behavior specific praise statements. The recorder used a tally chart to keep track of the different types of praise statements instead of a counter. At the end of each session the number of praise statements that were made was reviewed with the teacher.

The overall amount of praise statements went from 1.7 per class session to 21 praise statements. Most of the praise statements were non-behavior specific praise statements, but there was also an increase in behavior specific praise statements. The teacher was able to increase the amount of behavior specific praise statements from zero statements to an average of 6 behavior

specific praise statements per session. This is another example of how teacher training, monitoring, and feedback can increase the amount of behavior specific praise that is used in the classroom.

The research has shown that teacher training and feedback has a direct effect on the amounts of praise that the teacher uses in the classroom. The more a teacher is aware of their use of praise and how it changes the student's behavior in a positive way the more the teacher will use praise in their classroom (Mesa, Lewis-Palmer et al.2005).

Summary

Praise and positive reinforcement are two things that work well together to shape the behavior all students and especially students with disabilities. (Germer, et al.2011). The types of praise that is used, teacher training, and teacher feedback are all important factors that play a role in how effectively praise can be used in the classroom. If used correctly praise is very effective in changing student behavior from off task or inappropriate to on task and appropriate (Mesa et al.2005). From the studies that were reviewed it is shown that praise is an important aspect to running a classroom and school smoothly. Praise should be used with all students and especially students with disabilities. Praise helps to create a safe school environment where students are able to grow academically, change their behavior, and their lives for the better. School administrators and teachers should be working together to promote praise and positive reinforcement in the school environment so that the school can run well.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction:

Students with mild to moderate disabilities in an afterschool setting often exemplify off task behaviors. Students need a positive environment where they can remain on task. Specific positive praise is one tool that has been used to shape students behavior from being off task to on task behavior (Germer, et al. 2011). There continues to be a need for teachers and school staff to learn the effective use of praise to shape the behavior of students with mild to moderate disabilities. This study will focus on how training and feedback for teachers might effect on task behavior for students with mild to moderate disabilities. In this section I will describe the methods for collecting and analyzing data to answer the research questions which are:

1. Does specific praise and positive reinforcement help shape the behavior of students who have mild to moderate special education needs in an after school setting?
2. What are the effects of specific praise and positive reinforcement on students who have mild to moderate special education needs in the after school education environment?
3. Does sharing strategies to promote the use of praise with an after school program teacher increase consistent application for students with mild to moderate behavior?
4. Does sharing strategies to promote the use of praise with an after school program teacher increase on task behavior for students with mild to moderate disabilities?

Research Design

For the study I will be using the AB model of research design. In the AB model the first step is to observe how the classroom functions before the intervention I have created is implemented. The second step is to observe the classroom for several weeks after the interventions have been implemented. This type of design will allow me to investigate if the amount of praise used in the classroom increases with proper teacher training and support. It

will also allow me to examine if students with mild to moderate disabilities will be able to increase their amount of on task behaviors because of the increased amount of praise from their teachers. The AB design with several weeks of observation and teacher support should be adequate to show the effects of increased teacher praise on students with mild to moderate disabilities.

The type of research being used in this study will be able to answer the research questions using quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Quantitative data in this study will include direct observation of teacher and student behavior both before and after the intervention has been implemented, and a tally chart that is kept by the volunteering teacher showing the number of praise statements used during teaching. This will show the amount of praise statements used by the teacher and the amount of time the students in the class spend on task. Qualitative data in this study will include teacher and observer journaling, and student surveys. At the end of the study the teacher will be given a short interview. These elements will show the overall feelings of the teacher, students, and researcher as to how well praise works in increasing the amount of on task behavior of all the students in the classroom with a focus on the students with mild to moderate disabilities.

Setting

My research will take place at “Smith Elementary School” in the “Smith Union School District”, in “Smith”, California. The following information has been gathered from the United State Census Bureau 2010, community websites and the “Smith Union School District” website.

Community

The community of “Smith City” is a mid-sized farming city, of 155,662 people, where much of the city’s economy depends on the agriculture industry. The city is commonly referred

to as “The Salad Bowl of the World”. 50.4% of the population is male and 49.6% are female. 64% of the population is from the Hispanic or Latino culture, 45% of the population is white, 6.3% of the population is Asian, 2% of the population is African American, and 1.3% of the population is American Indian. The average household income is \$49,264 a year, with 21% of the population below poverty level. This is higher than California’s average. 37% of the population is foreign born; this is also higher than the state average. The percent of people who have a language other than English spoken at home is 68.5%. The percent of people who are high school graduates is 60%. The percent of people who have a college Bachelor’s Degree or higher is only 12%. “Smith” is a community of hard working people with many needs.

School site

The school that I will be working with is “Smith Elementary School”, in the “Smith Union School District”. In this district there are four elementary schools and two middle schools. There are 670 students at this school site who are in kindergarten through fifth grade. 330 of the students are boys and 340 of the students are girls. 95% of the school population is of Hispanic background, 4% is white, and less than one percent is Asian and African American. 72% of the students are English Language Learners, with 87% English Language Learners speaking Spanish, 12% speak Mixteco, and less than one percent of EL students speak Filipino. Only 2% of the students have moved here from other countries within the past two years. 8% of the students in this school are in Special Education. 70% of the special education students are also English Language. Enough of the students at the school qualified for the free and reduced lunch program, so that the entire school is able to receive free lunch. 35% of the school qualifies for the Migrant program, which gives extra support to students of families who move often due to changing working conditions.

There are twenty-five teachers at this school, including one Resource Specialist Position, one Speech and Language Therapist, and one School Psychologist. Nineteen teachers are female and six teachers are male. Eighteen teachers are of European descent and seven teachers are of Hispanic descent. Three teachers are participating in the After School Education and Safety (ASES) program.

There are five Kindergarten classes with an average class size of twenty-five. In First grade there are four classes with an average class size of twenty-eight students. In second grade there are five classes with an average class size of twenty-six students. In third grade there are four classes with an average class size of twenty-six. In fourth grade there are four classes with an average class size of twenty-seven students. Lastly, in fifth grade there are three classes with an average class size of thirty students.

After school education and safety program

The research will be collected using a volunteering teacher, class, and four focus students from ASES program. The ASES program is a government funded after school program, run by a director, teachers, and aids that also work at the school during the regular day. This program is available to students at the school. Students are selected for the program based on their previous year's state test scores and teacher recommendation. If there is any room left in the program open spots are offered to any student who would like to be in the program. There are currently 100 students in the program with twenty-five students in four classes. Each class has one hour of English Language Arts instruction, one hour of homework help, one hour of extracurricular activities, dinner and two fifteen minute recess periods.

Participants**Class**

A second grade class from the ASES program at the school will be used. There are twenty-six students in the class. Fifteen of the students are girls and twelve students are boys. Four of the students in the class receive Special Education services. One of the students with special needs is a fourth grader. He has been placed in the second grade class because what is being taught is at his academic level. There is one newcomer in the class. 81% of the students are English Language learners. During class sessions the volunteering teacher, who is a teacher at the school during the regular day, works with this class for one hour. She teaches English Language arts with a focus on phonics, sight word reading, parts of speech, grammar, and reading comprehension.

Teacher

The volunteering teacher is a veteran teacher who has been working in the education profession for the last thirty years. During this time she has taught first and second grades for the past thirty years. She has been working at Santa Rita Elementary School in the Santa Rita Union School District for thirty years. She currently teaches first grade at the school. She also has been involved in the migrant program for two years and the afterschool program for one year. She is a native Spanish speaker and of Hispanic origin.

Focus student #1

The first focus student is a second grade boy. He is an English Language Learner. He is a student with a Specific Learning Disability. He also has a disability in the area of Speech and Language. His areas of need are in reading comprehension, reading fluency, phonics, spelling, and math. He currently reads at a kindergarten level. In math he struggles with remembering

the procedure for regrouping when adding and subtracting. He also has difficulties with memory and is a slow processor. He is a shy student with low self-confidence, which causes him to not participate in class. He also has poor daily school attendance.

Focus student #2

Focus student number is also a second grade boy. He is an English Language Learner. He is a student with a Specific Learning Disability. His areas of need lie with in reading comprehension, fluency, and spelling. He currently reads at a beginning first grade level. He also has difficulties with memory. He does not have many behavior issues. He has good confidence, is likeable, and gets along well with others. He has a twin sister that is also in the same after school program class.

Focus student #3

Focus student number three is a fourth grade boy. He is an English Language Learner. He is a student with a Specific Learning Disability. His areas of need are in reading comprehension, reading fluency, spelling and phonics. He currently reads at a beginning first grade level. He has trouble remembering vowel spelling patterns which causes him to have more trouble with reading. He has glasses, but does not wear them. He behaves well in class as long as the work that has been given to him is appropriate. When work is too hard he will not participate in class and talk with his neighbors. He has been placed in the second grade after school program class because he is reading at a first grade level. Even though he is in the fourth grade this is the most appropriate academic placement for him.

Focus student #4

Focus student number four is a second grade boy. He is an English Only student. He is a student with a Speech and Language Disability. His area of need is in articulation. He has

difficulty producing the /r/ sound. Although he has a Speech and Language Disability is not academically behind he is same aged peers. In the Speech and Language small group setting, he generally remains on-task, but can be distractible and act silly on occasion. With gentle reminders from the Speech and Language Pathologist he is able to correct his behavior. In the general large group setting he is more disruptive. He becomes distracted easily and often talks with his neighbors.

Data Collection Procedures

This section will address the processes that were taken before, during, and after the intervention of teacher training to increase the amount of specific praise that is used with students with mild to moderate disabilities in a second grade after school program setting. This will done to determine if with an increased amount of teacher praise for students with mild to moderate disabilities will the students also increase their amount of on-task behavior?

Intervention

I have created a 30 minute Power Point training session (see Appendix A), for the volunteering afterschool teacher. This training session will focus on how to use behavior specific praise with opportunities for the teacher to practice using praise. It will also emphasize the importance of using behavior specific praise very frequently with a focus on the students who have disabilities in her class. The teacher will be asked to create a goal for the number of praise statements the teacher believes she will be able to make for each student with disabilities and a goal for the rest of the students in the class during the observation period. In addition, the training session will describe to the teacher how to keep track of the amount of praise statements that she is using as she is teaching by using a tally chart with the names of the focus students listed and one section labeled class (see Appendix B). This training will take place after my

initial week of observation to gain a baseline of teacher the amount of praise statements the teachers uses and student behavior on task behavior, has been completed.

Implementation

First, I will observe the after school program for one week for thirty minute session each day. This is so I can take initial data on the frequency of behavior specific praise versus non behavior specific praise statements teacher of the afterschool program uses in the classroom and which students are getting the most praise (see Appendix C). I will also collect data of the on task verses off task behaviors that students are showing as the teacher is presenting the lesson on a chart that has been adapted from The Tough Kids Tool Box (Jenson, Rhode, & Kenton Reavis, 1994) (see Appendix D).

Next, I will train the afterschool teacher with materials I have created (see Appendix A) to show the teacher how to give behavior specific praise more often in the classroom. The training includes things like different types of praise statements that can be used, how often praise should be used, and a tally mark tracking systems (see Appendix B) so that the teacher can be aware of how much praise she is using in the classroom and for which students. I will also share the initial data that I had collected from my first week of observations. From this information the teacher will create a goal for giving more behavior specific praise statements to the entire class and for each focus student. This training will help the teacher to increase the amount of behavior specific praise statements that she uses with the entire class and students with disabilities.

After the training, I will observe the teacher and class daily for a five week period. Each observation period will last 30 minutes. For the first week after the training session, the teacher will use a tally chart to personally keep track of number of praise statements that are given to each of the focus students and the entire class. I will correspondingly document how often the

teacher uses behavior specific praise versus non-behavior specific praise in the classroom on my own tally chart. This chart will have the names of the focus students listed and a section for the rest of the class. At the same time I will record the number of on-task versus off-task behaviors that the four focus students and then the rest of the students in the class demonstrate. This will be done in five minute intervals, for each of the four focus students and then two randomly chosen students in the class. During the weeks after the training session the researcher and teacher will keep a short journal to document any thoughts, feelings, or questions about using behavior specific praise more often in the classroom.

At the end of this second week I will have a meeting with the teacher to go over the data I have collected. I will show the teacher a graph of the number of behavior specific praise statements that she is using versus the amount of on task behavior her students are showing. I will remind the teacher of the goal she made for the number of praise statements for each student and if she is meeting that goal. I will give direction to the teacher on how she can use more praise statements during his class. This will also be opportunity to answer any questions that the teacher may have about using praise in the afterschool program.

For the second week of observation after the training almost everything will be the same. The teacher will keep a tally chart of her praise statements. I will observe for 30 minutes daily the types of teachers praise statements and student on task behavior. Both the teacher and I will keep short journals about feelings, questions or thoughts about behavior specific praise. The main difference for the second week after training is that I will provide daily teacher feedback. Before each class session I will show the teacher a graph of the amount of praise statements she uses in class compared to the amount of on task behavior the students display. At the end of the second observation week the teacher and I will have a meeting to go over any questions or

concerns. I will still have to opportunity to give more examples of how to use behavior specific praise in the classroom. We will also discuss the added element of getting daily feedback from the researcher.

For the third, fourth, and fifth weeks of observation after the training the same procedures will be used as before. The teacher will keep a tally chart of her praise statements. I will observe for 30 minutes daily the teachers praise statements and student on task behavior. Both the teacher and I will keep short journals about feelings, questions or thoughts about behavior specific praise. The teacher will get daily feedback of the amount of behavior specific praise statements and student on task behavior. During these last weeks of observation the teacher will receive daily reminders of her praise statement goal as well.

At the end of the fifth week the students of the class will be given a survey (see Appendix E). The survey will be read to them and questions will be answered if they have any. A final meeting will be had with the teacher of the class. A short interview (see Appendix F) will be given to the teacher. The final results will be reviewed with the teacher. Any questions, concerns, or thoughts will also be addressed at this time.

Data Analysis

From the data collection period of four weeks of observations and trainings I will have enough information collected to show whether or not teacher training, daily graphs of student and teacher behavior, and goal reminders increases the amount of behavior specific praise statements the teacher uses in the classroom. Since I will be utilizing an AB research design, which establishes a relationship between the intervention and the outcome I will also be able to show if there is or is not a correlation between increased teacher praise statements and increased student on-task behavior in students with mild to moderate disabilities. For this study the

independent variable will be the intervention of training the classroom teacher to use more praise in the classroom with a focus on students with disabilities. The dependent variable will be the increase of student with disabilities on task behavior. All of the data collection will be done by me the researcher conducting the study. In this section I will describe how I plan to use the data that I have collected in regards to answering my research questions.

Quantitative data

The before intervention observation data will give baseline information on how often the teacher is using behavior specific praise versus non behavior specific praise in the classroom and for which students. The before intervention data will also give baseline information for the amount of on task behavior versus off task behavior is being shown in the classroom for the four focus students with mild to moderate disabilities and for general education students in the class. This quantitative data will be used to show the amount of teachers praise use and the students' amount of on-task behavior before the intervention has been implemented.

After the intervention of teacher training has been implemented the teacher will use a tally chart system to self-monitor the amount of praise statements she makes during each observation period. The self-reported use of praise tracking system that is to be used by the teacher will show how much praise the teacher thinks she is giving and to which students. This qualitative will be used to show that a tally chart system may or may not help a teacher to increase their use of praise statements for certain students in the class.

Also after the teacher training has been implemented five more weeks of observation and data collection will be completed. Again the observer will collect information on the amount of the types of teacher praise statements and for which students in the class. Also, the observer will collect data on the on-task behavior versus off-task behavior for the four focus students and other

students in the class. This data will be used to show whether or not the training and tally chart system increases the amount of teacher praise statements. It will also show if there is a correlation between increased teacher use of praise for the focus students and the class and the amount of on task behavior that those students show.

Qualitative data

An Interview (see appendix F) will be given to the teacher, at the end of the four week observation and intervention period, to determine how the teacher feels about the effects of using specific praise in their classroom. Some questions that will be asked are: Do you like using praise? Do you feel that students are more on task during their lessons? Do you feel students with special needs were on task during their lessons? This information will be used to give the overall feelings of the volunteering teacher.

The students in the class will also be given a questionnaire (see appendix E) at the end of the four week observation period. This will be to determine how they feel after the intervention of increased teacher praise has been implemented, and about how much praise their teacher uses in the classroom. Some questions that will be asked are: Does your teacher use praise in the classroom? Do you like it when your teacher uses praise? Does praise help you to pay attention in class? This qualitative information will be used to show the feelings of the students in the class about the praise that their teacher uses with them.

Journaling for both myself and the teacher participant will be used as a form of qualitative data. After the training the teacher will be asked to keep a short daily journal on how they feel about using praise and how praise affects the behavior of students in their class. I will also keep a short journal during the baseline data collection week, teacher training, meetings with the

teacher, and daily classroom observation. This data will be used to show how well the trainer and trainee feel the trainings went and how well the teacher is implementing praise.

Limitations

It is important to note that there may be some threats to the validity of the study that may occur during the study. First attendance of the focus students during the study is very important. It is important for all students to attend the afterschool program during the five weeks of observation. If students are not present during the observation periods it will be difficult to get an accurate collection of on task behavior for all the students in the class. Second, this will be the first time I will be giving training on how to give and use specific praise in the classroom. There may be unforeseen issues that arise during the training. Third, the teacher that volunteers to be in the study is already very positive and has good classroom control. There is the possibility that the teacher that has volunteered to work with me is already a very positive teacher, who uses praise very often. I will not know this information until I do my first week of observations.

Fourth, it is possible that the time frame I have chosen will not be long enough. I am only going to be doing observations for six weeks. One week of baseline observation and five weeks of observation and various interventions. I may need to increase the amount of observation weeks after the intervention has been given. This is so I will be able to get more data collection dates and make my study more valid. Lastly, I am the only data collector and I may have a bias towards praise. I use praise in my own classroom and it works well for me. After the intervention I must collect the classroom data exactly as it is happens and not how I want it to happen.

Summary

Through working with a volunteering teacher at “Smith Elementary School” I will be able to collect a sufficient amount of data to answer my proposed research questions. I will observe the class and teacher for one week to obtain baseline information. I will train the volunteering teacher to use more behavior specific praise with the students in the class with mild to moderate disabilities. I will have the teacher keep a tally chart of the praise statements that she uses with the class. During this time I will observe the teacher and students to see if the teacher is able to increase the amount of praise statements used from before the baseline data. I will also observe the students to see if they also increase the amount of on-task behavior during each observation session. At the end the teacher and students will be asked for their opinions on the use of teacher praise in the classroom. Taking these measures will allow me to collect the data needed to determine the effects of increased teacher praise on students with mild to moderate disabilities in the afterschool setting.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter I will review the data that was collected from the research that was conducted. To collect data I used a mixed methods research design. Quantitative data was gathered from direct observation of the number of behavior specific praise the participating teacher used before and after the intervention of behavior specific praise training was given. Further qualitative data came from direct observation of student on-task verses off-task behavior, before and after the teacher intervention. Qualitative data was collected from a teacher interview, student survey, and journaling that was completed by the researcher.

All research was conducted to answer the following research questions: 1. Does specific praise and positive reinforcement help shape the behavior of students who have mild to moderate special education needs in an after school setting? 2. What are the effects of specific praise and positive reinforcement on students who have mild to moderate special education needs in the after school education environment? 3. Does sharing strategies to promote the use of praise with an after school program teacher increase consistent application for students with mild to moderate behavior? 4. Does sharing strategies to promote the use of praise with an after school program teacher increase on task behavior for students with mild to moderate disabilities?

As the data that was collected and analyzed several patterns emerged that were related to the research questions: Teacher training does increase teacher use of specific praise, the day of the week seems to have an effect on the amount of teacher praise, there is a correlation between increased teacher behavior specific praise and increased on-task behavior for nearly all students in the after school program including students with mild to moderate disabilities, and for behavior specific praise to be effective it needs to be a reinforcing factor for the student.

Effects Of Teacher Training On Teacher Use Of Praise

The main focuses of this research was to investigate if improved teacher training would increase the amount of praise a teacher would use with focus on students with mild to moderate disabilities and with the whole class. This section will focus on the baseline data, training, and recording weekly results of the number of praise statements that the teacher used with the students with mild to moderate disabilities and with other individual students in the class.

Baseline data: teacher praise statements

During the base line week the data showed that for students with mild to moderated disabilities, the teacher used any type of praise statement with an average of less than one time per session. For other students in the classroom the teacher used praise statements on an average of nine times per thirty minute session. Also during the baseline data collection phase the teacher used praise statements for the whole class on an average of 8.8 times per thirty minute session. The majority of the praise statements the teacher used during the baseline phase were non-behavior specific. She often would simply state “Good” or “Very good” after a student would answer a question correctly when called upon. Prior to the intervention training the participating teacher was using more praise with individual students as well as the whole class. Very rarely did the teacher use praise statements for students with mild to moderate disabilities.

Teacher training

After observing the after school program daily for one week to secure baseline data regarding the number of praise statements the teacher uses with her students I meet with the teacher vis-à-vis a Power Point training. This thirty minute training focused on the following elements: current research that is known about specific praise, how to use behavior specific praise in the classroom, practice using praise, how to use the tally chart to help her keep track of

her praise statements, selection of focus students, and creating a personal goal for the number of praise statements the teacher thought she would be able to use with each focus student per session.

Since the teacher has been teaching for many years she stated that she knows a lot about praise, but fails to remember to use it. She was happy to receive the training as a “refresher” in how to use praise and how often. In addition I spoke with teacher about how she used very little praise with the students with disabilities. She stated that they are easy to overlook because there are so few of them and they are often very quiet in class, except for one. Together we chose the four students with mild to moderate disabilities as the focus of the study. The teacher also chose a goal of two praises per focus students per thirty minute session.

Post intervention week 1

During the first week after the training the interventions that were available to the teacher were the self-monitoring tally chart with the names of the four focus students, the knowledge of the goal that she had set for herself, and the training that had been given the previous Friday. For focus student number one the teacher increased her praise statements from an average of 0.3 during the baseline week to an average of 3.5. Her highest numbers of praise statements were on day four of the week with 4 praise statements. For focus student number two the teacher increased her praise statements from an average of 0.8 during the baseline week to an average of 3.4. Her highest tally of praise statements was 5. Her lowest number of praise statements was on day three of the week, with 2 praise statements. For focus student number three the teacher increased her praise statements from an average of 1.4 during the baseline week to an average of 3.2. Her highest numbers of praise statements were on day one of the week with 5 praise statements. Her lowest number of praise statements was on day five with only one praise

statement. For focus student number four the teacher increased her praise statements from an average of 0.6 during the baseline week to an average of 3. Her highest numbers of praise statements were on day one of the week with 6 praise statements. Her lowest numbers of praise statements were on day five with only one praise statement. For each of the focus students during the first week after the intervention the teacher started the week with the most praise. Towards the end of the week her praise statements decreased from the beginning of the week, but she still used more praise than she had during the baseline data collection period. See figure 1.

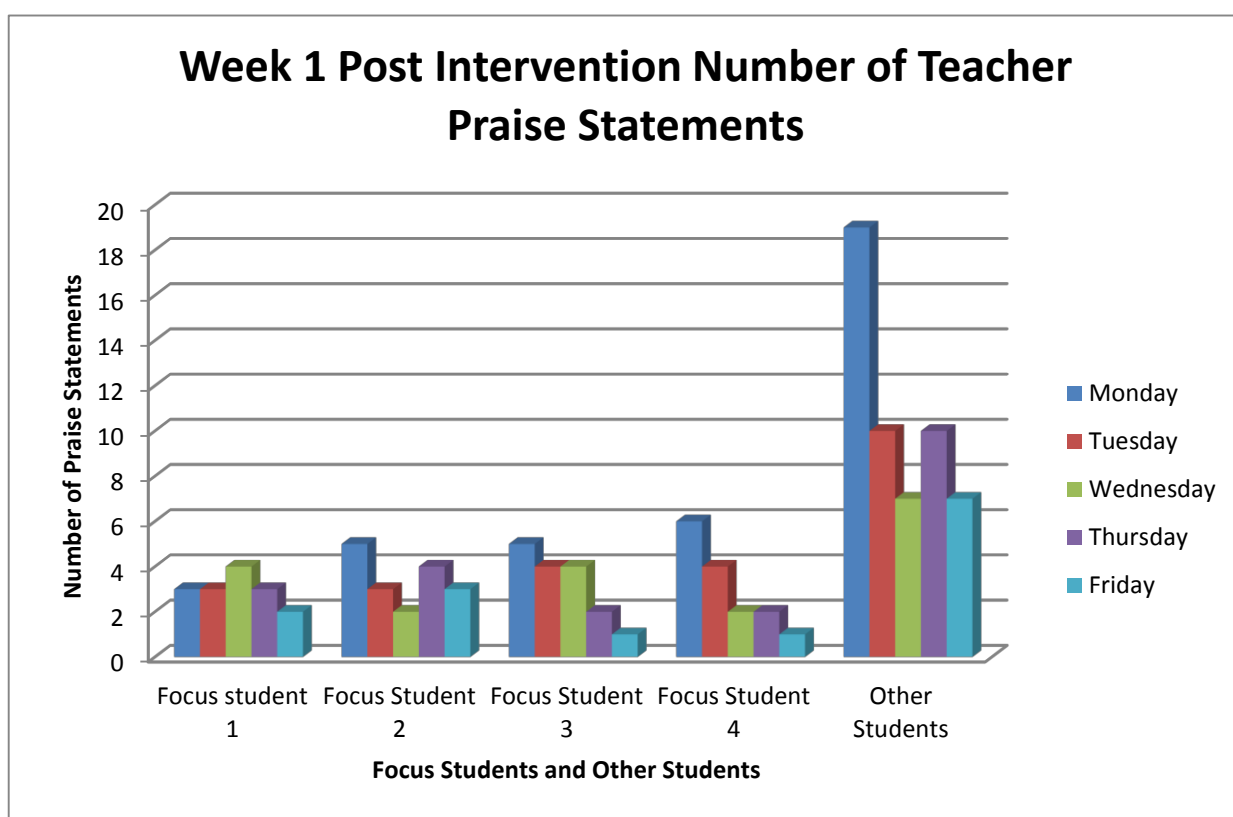


Figure 1. Week 1, Post Intervention Number of Teacher Praise Statements, graph showing the number of praise statements the teacher used each day with each focus student and other students in the class.

In addition nearly every day she was able to meet her goal of two praise statements for each focus student. Also, the type of praise the teacher gave changed from nearly all praise statements being non-behavior specific, to nearly all praise statements being behavior specific. She would make statements like: “I like the way focus student number one is doing the hand motions” or “Focus student number four is sitting very quietly, very good.” When she made these types of statements it had a great positive effect on the on-task behavior of the student she was praising and the other students seated near the student who received the praise.

The teacher was also able to increase praise statements for the rest of the students in the class as well. For individuals in the class the teacher increased her praise statements from an average of 9 during the baseline week to an average of 10.4. Her highest numbers of praise statements were on day one of the week with 19 praise statements. Her lowest number of praise statements was on day five of the week with 7 praise statements. Similar to the focus students the teacher started the week with increased praise and decreased her praise as the week continued. See figure 1. The teacher decreased the number of praise statements made to the whole class from an average of 8.8 statements during the baseline week to an average of 4. Her highest numbers of praise statements was on day one of the week with 6 praise statements. Her lowest number of praise statements was on day five of the week with 0 praise statements. Some possibilities for this decrease in whole class praise could be that the training that was given to the teacher only focused on giving praise to individuals in the class or that the teacher was now spending much more time praising individuals that group praise decreased.

At the end of the week I had a short meeting with the teacher to review the graphs I had created. This was to show her how praise statements had increased from before baseline to now. We also discussed how her praise use was commensurate with the beginning of the week and

lessened towards the end of the week. The teacher indicated that fatigue was a factor and the adherence to the praise protocol diminished. We discussed her use of the self-monitoring tally chart. She stated that the tally chart was helpful in reminding her to use praise for the focus students in the class. During this first week after the intervention the teacher used her tally chart daily. More examples of behavior specific praise was given and the goal of two praises statements per focus student per thirty minute session were reviewed during this meeting as well.

Post intervention week 2

During the second week after the initial training the interventions that were available to the teacher were as follows: the initial training session, self-monitoring tally chart, knowledge of daily goal of two praise statements, and daily graphs of the teachers praise statements versus student on-task behavior were presented to the teacher before her class session. Adding daily graphs of teacher praise statements verses student behavior was incorporated to illustrate if this action would help to increase the amount of praise the teacher used or to help the teacher use praise more consistently.

For focus student number one the teacher had an average of three praise statements during this week. She used three praise statements each day for this student. Her average of praise statements is similar to the first week after the intervention, but this week she was more consistent. For focus student number two the teacher had an average of two praise statements during this week. Her highest day of praises had three praise statements and her lowest day of praises had only one. The teacher's praise statements decreased during this week for this student, but she still met her goal of two praise statements. For focus student number three the teacher had an average of three praise statements during this week. On her peak day of praises she had five praise statements were recorded whereas on and her lowest day of praises she only

recorded one. This is very similar to the results as in week one after intervention. For focus student number four the teacher had an average of 3.3 praise statements during this week. On her peak day four praise statements were recorded in contrast to her lowest day where only two praise statements were recorded. Her average number of praise statements for this week is very similar to the previous week, but she was more consistent with her praise statements from day to day. As for individuals students the teacher had an average of 13 praise statements. Her highest day of praises had 20 praise statements and her lowest day had 9. This week the teacher increased her number of praise statements for individuals, but she still followed the same pattern of starting with a high number of praises and decreased as the week continued. For the whole class the teacher had an average of 4.3 praise statements during this week. Her highest day of praises had six praise statements and her lowest day of praises had only two. Again her praise statements were less than base line, but similar to week one after intervention.

It seems that providing the teacher with a graph of her amount of praise verses student on-task behavior did not have much of an effect either way in the amount of praise that the teacher used during the week from the previous week. The teacher also failed to use the self-monitoring tally chart on the second day of the week. On this day she was leading the class in a choral reading of a selection from their text book. During this lesson she was up walking around the room monitoring students' reading. She was not at her desk close enough to make tally marks. Again at the end of this week we had a short meeting to further look at student graphs and review goals that have been set. We talked about the importance of using the tally chart as much as possible.

Post intervention weeks 3, 4, and 5

During the last three weeks after the initial training, the interventions that were available to the teacher were: the initial training session, self-monitoring tally chart, daily verbal reminders from the researcher of the praise statement goal that was made, and daily graphs of the teachers praise statements versus student on-task behavior. For the third, fourth, and fifth weeks after the baseline week the main change that was made was that the researcher daily gave a verbal reminder of the goal of two praise statements per student with special needs before the class began.

For focus student number one the last three weeks had a weekly average of 2, 3.5 and 3 praise statements per session. For focus student number two the last three weeks had a weekly average of 2, 3 and 3 praise statements per session. For focus student number three the last three weeks had a weekly average of 2.5, 3 and 3 praise statements per session. For focus student number four the last three weeks had a weekly average of 3.3, 2 and 5.3 praise statements per session. For all the focus students the teacher met her daily goal of at least two statements per session and was consistent in giving between two and four praise statements per session. For individuals in the class during the last three weeks after the initial intervention the teacher used praise statements with these students on a weekly average of 13, 8.2, and 13.6 praise statements per session. For praise statements that the teacher made to the whole class the teacher's weekly averages were 5, 7.3 and 6 praise statements.

During the last three weeks of observation giving the extra intervention of verbal reminders did not seem to increase the amount of praise that she had already been giving to the class. Also, for the last three weeks of observation the teacher failed to use her self-monitoring tally chart, but this did not seem to matter. The teacher was able to maintain similar amounts of

praise from week to week even without remember to use the self-monitoring tally chart. Also, on the fifth day of the fourth week after baseline the research gave the class a survey to take. The researcher gave the survey herself with the participating teacher observing the survey being given to her class. Unknowingly, the researcher who constantly uses praise modeled for the participating teacher the amount of praise that should be given during any period. After the survey was given the teacher went back to teaching her class, but used more praise than on any other day during the study.

Overall the teacher was able to increase the amount of behavior specific praise statements that she used with students with disabilities and with individual students in the class. See figure 2. For focus student number one her baseline average was 0.3 praise statements per session. After the initial intervention and succeeding interventions the teacher's overall average was 2.9 praise statements per session. For focus student number two her baseline average was 0.8 praise statements per session. After the initial intervention and succeeding interventions the teacher's overall average was 2.9 praise statements per session. For focus student number three her baseline average was 1.4 praise statements per session. After the initial intervention and succeeding interventions the teacher's overall average was 2.9 praise statements per session. For focus student number four her baseline average was 0.6 praise statements per session. After the initial intervention and succeeding interventions the teacher's overall average was 3.2 praise statements per session. For each focus student the teacher was able to exceed her goal of two praise statements per session by almost one whole praise statement. In addition, the types of praise statements she made had also changed. Before the intervention all her praise statements were non-behavior specific. Now after the intervention and many days of practicing behavior specific praise nearly all the teacher's praise statements are behavior specific praise.

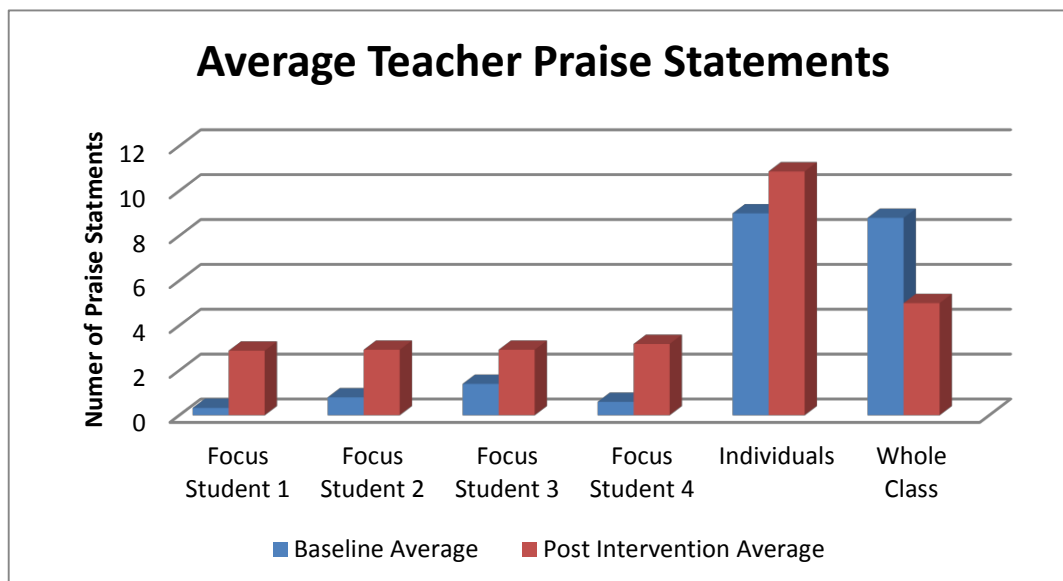


Figure 2. Average Teacher Praise Statements, graph of the average number of praise statements the teacher made to each focus student, individual students, and the whole class before and after the intervention was given to the teacher.

For individuals in the class the teacher's baseline average was 9 praise statements per session. After the initial intervention and succeeding interventions the teacher's overall average was 10.8 praise statements per session. See figure 2. The teacher was able to increase her average praise statements for individuals, but not as much as for the students with mild to moderate disabilities. This is possibly because she was already using praise with other individuals in the class and the training did not focus on increasing praise for students without disabilities. For whole class praise statements the teacher's baseline average was 8.8 praise statements per session. After the initial intervention and succeeding interventions the teacher's overall average was five praise statements per session. On average her whole class praise statements went down. See figure 2. This could be because the study did not focus on whole

class praise and the teacher is spending more time praising the focus students and other individuals in the class.

Interview

An interview was given to the volunteering teacher to assess her thoughts and feelings about using praise in her after school program and with students with special needs. She stated that the thing that helped her most to use more praise in the classroom was the training that she received from the researcher towards the beginning of the study. Since she has been teaching many years, she already knew a great deal about praise, but the training helped her to remember to use it. Also, the researcher coming into her classroom every afternoon was a strong reminder to use more praise, especially with student with mild to moderate disabilities. In general, she enjoys using more praise in her classroom. She feels that it benefits all students, including students with mild to moderate disabilities. She stated that she has seen improved behavior especially with focus student number four. Using praise make her feel good as well. Here main challenge was trying to find something to praise if a student was not behaving very well that afternoon. She will continue to use praise in her classroom. She understands the importance of it and knows she just has to remember to use it consistently for it to be effective.

Effects Of Increased Teacher Praise Use On Students With Disabilities' On-Task Behavior

A second focus of this research was to examine if a teacher increased the amount of praise that was used in the class room, would that effect the on-task behavior of the students in the classroom with a focus being the students with mild to moderate disabilities. This section will review the results for each focus students' on-task behavior verses the number of praise statements that were given by the classroom teacher. It will also review the results of the on-task behavior for the rest of the students in the class.

Focus student #1

During the baseline week focus student number one had an average of 77.6% of the time when he was engaged in on-task behavior. The majority of the time when this student was not on task it was due to non-participation in whole class activities. He would often sit quietly, but not respond when the whole class was supposed to respond or participate when the whole class was supposed to be participating in an activity. His highest day of on task behavior had 93% on-task and his lowest day had 60% on-task behavior. Correspondingly, his lowest and highest days were the same lowest and highest days for receiving praise statements from the teacher. On his lowest day of on-task behavior he received zero praise statements and on his highest day of on task behavior he received one praise statement.

During the second week of observation following the teacher training, the teacher did increase the number of praise statements with this student, but the amount of time he spent on task went down to an average of 60% of the time on-task. Again the type of off-task behavior being displayed was related to non-participation in whole class activities. For the following week the teacher again increased her praise use with this student and this time the amount on time he spent on-task in the classroom jumped up to 90%. During this week this student began participating more in whole group activities and the teacher made praise statements like “I like the way student number one is doing the motions and saying the sounds, very good.” Throughout the last four weeks of the study the teacher consistently used between two and four praise statements per day with this student. For the last four weeks of the study this student maintained an average of between 95% and 98% of the time in class spent on task. Overall the student went from an average of 77.6% of the time spent on-task before the intervention was

given to the teacher to 86.7% of the time spent on-task after the intervention was given to the teacher. See Figure 3.

Focus student #2

During the baseline week focus student number two had an average of 77.4% of the time when he was engaged in on-task behavior. This student had similar off-task behaviors as focus student number one. This student was also a very quiet student. His main off-task behaviors were related to non-participation in whole class activities. During his off-task times this student would sit very quietly not talking to neighbors and even looking towards the teacher, but he would not verbally participate when the whole group was asked to repeat a statement or say an answer. He also did not participate in hand motions that the whole class was asked to do. His highest day of on-task behavior was 93% on-task and his lowest day had 67% on-task behavior. Although, his lowest and highest on-task behavior days do not directly correspond to the amount of praise he was given for that day. On the day he had 93% on-task behavior he received zero praise statements from the teacher. On the day he had 67% on-task behavior he received the most amount of praise statements from the teacher, three praise statements for that day. During the baseline week the majority of praise statements that were used were non-behavior specific praise statements. Simply “very good” or “good” was stated when the student did something correctly.

During the second week of observation the teacher increased the amount of praise she used with this student dramatically. Also, all the praise statements she used were behavior specific. On the first day of the second week she used five praise statements with the student and the student had 97% on-task behavior for that day. On the day with the student’s lowest amount of on-task behavior, 87%, the teacher also used the least amount of praise with this student only

two praise statements. For the second week of observation this student had an average of 91% of the time spent on-task. Just like student number one student number two began participating in whole group activities. He could now be heard when practicing phonics, reading sight words, and from the text book. He also began to answer questions in class and do motions when practicing phonics.

Throughout the last four weeks of the study the teacher consistently used between two and four praise statements per day with this student. For the last four weeks of the study this student maintained an average of between 93% and 98% of the time in class spent on-task. Overall the student went from an average of 77.4% of the time spent on-task before the intervention was given to the teacher to 93.5% of the time spent on-task after the intervention was given to the teacher. See figure 3.

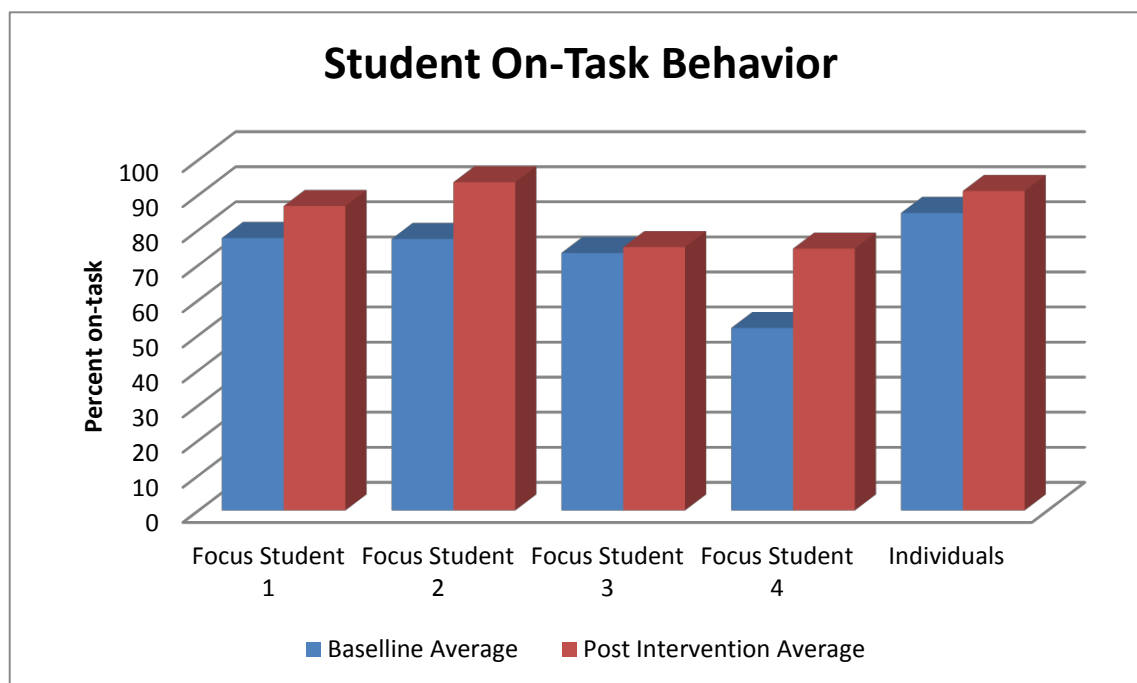


Figure 3. Student On-Task Behavior, graph shows the percent of on task behavior for each focus student before and after the intervention was given to the teacher.

Focus student #3

During the baseline week focus student number three had an average of 73.4% of the time when he was engaged in on-task behavior. The day when a dentist came to speak to the class about their teeth student three scored 100% for on-task behavior. The student seemed very interested in the presentation, but he received zero praise from his teacher. On the day student three recorded his score of 27% of time spent on-task he did not receive any praise statements for his on-task behavior nor for his behavior in general. During this week the majority of the praise statements directed towards student three were non-behavior specific. When this student was off-task he was often playing with items at his desk (pencils, books, and hats) as well as talking with other classmates.

During the second week of observation, the teacher increased the amount of praise she used with the student. On the first day of the second week, the teacher used five behavior specific praise statements with this student, but he only had 30% of the time spent on-task. The second day the teacher used four praise statements, but he only had 40% of the time spent on-task. The third day the teacher used four praise statements again, but he only had 43% of the time spent on-task. On the fourth day of this week the teacher used less praise statements, only two. On this day the student's behavior increased to 67% of the time spent on-task. On the fifth day of the week, the teacher used even less praise with this student, only one praise statement. On this day the student spent 83% of the time on-task. When the teacher would make praise statements to this student he would often put his hood on as if he were trying to hide. This would interfere with class participation increasing his off-task behavior for much of the lesson. For that week the less praise statements that were made to the student the more the student remained on-task. Also, the praise statements that were now made to this student were mostly

behavior specific praise statements. For the second week of this student had an averaged 52.6% of the time spent on task, which is a decrease in the average amount of time spent on task during the baseline week, which was 73.4%.

Throughout the last four weeks of the study the teacher consistently used between one and five praise statements per day with this student. On days when the teacher used more praise statements the student was less on-task. When the teacher on used one or two praise statements the student was on-task an average of 90% of the time. On days when the teacher used between three and five praise statements his on-task behavior decreased to 83% of the time spent on-task. Days when the teacher used the most praise this student was the most off-task. Overall the student remained about the same in his average amount of on-task behavior from 73.40% at baseline to an average of 75% of the time on-task during the last five weeks of the study. See figure 3.

Focus student #4

During the baseline week focus student number four had an average of 52% of the time when he was engaged in on-task behavior. On his highest day his on-task behavior was 80% of the time was spent on-task. On this day he received only one non-behavior specific praise statement from his teacher. On his lowest day he had 13% on-task behavior. This day he also received one praise statements from his teachers. During this week the majority of the praise statements that were made to this student were non-behavior specific. When this student was off-task he was talking to his neighbors, out of his seat, playing with things, or not participating in group activities. This student as expressed by the teacher was one of her more challenging students. She stated, "He always wants attention."

During the second week of observation the teacher increased the amount of praise she used with the student. On the first day of the second week, the teacher used six behavior specific praise statements with this student. On the first day he increased in on task behavior to 93%. The second day the teacher used four praise statements. With a little less praise this student was less on-task only 80%. On the third and fourth days of the week the teacher used two praise statements each day. Again with less praise this student's behavior decreased to 65% and 73%. On the last day of the week the student was only on-task for 47% of class session. The student was often out of his seat and talking to his neighbors. The teacher only gave one praise statement to the student during this day. On that Friday we had our weekly meeting and I spoke with the teacher about why she did not use praise with this student. She stated that she could not give praise if the student wasn't behaving. She did not realize that he was behaving 47% of the time. She did have opportunities to use praise to increase his on-task behavior, but missed it.

Throughout the last four weeks of the study the teacher used between one and seven praise statements per day with this student. This student had a weekly average between 69% and 85%, depending on the amount of praise that the teacher used with the student. On days when the teacher used more praise statements the student was more on-task. When the teacher on used between three and seven praise statements the student was on-task an average of 85% of the time. When the teacher used only one or two statements the student's on-task behavior decreased to 65% of the time spent on-task. Overall the student increased his amount on-task time from 52% at baseline to an average of 75% of the time on-task during the last five weeks of the study. See figure 3.

Individuals

During the baseline week the individuals in the class who did not have mild to moderate disabilities had an average of 84.40% of the time when they were engaged in on-task behavior. On the highest day the individuals were on-task 90% of the time. On lowest day of on-task behavior the individuals in the class had 79% on-task behavior. This day the individuals received seven non-behavior specific praise statements from the teachers. During this week the most of the praise statements were non-behavior specific. The teacher would comment “Good”, “Very good”, pass out stickers, or small edible snacks with no description of why they were receiving praise or a treat. Most of the off-task behavior that was displayed during this time was talking with neighbors, interrupting a teacher during a lesson, or non-participation in group activities.

During the second week of observation, the teacher increased the amount of praise she used with individuals in the class. On the first day of the second week the teacher used 19 behavior specific praise statements with various individuals in the class. On the first day the individuals increased in on task behavior to 89%. The second and fourth day the teacher used 10 praise statements. With a little less praise, the individuals in the class were a little less on-task. Both days the individuals only had 85% of the time spent on-task. On the third and fifth days of the week the teacher used seven praise statements each day. On these days the students were more on-task with 94% and 96% of the time spent on task, even though the teacher used less praise. Overall, in the second week the teacher increased her praise statements and the students went from 85% of the time spent on-task to 90% of the time spent on task.

Throughout the last four weeks of the study the teacher used between seven and twenty praise statements per day various individuals in the class. The other students in the class had a weekly average between 85% and 95% of the time spent on-task, depending on the amount of

praise that the teacher used with individuals. In general the more the teacher praised the class, the more on-task the class was. Overall the students in the class increased their amount on-task time from an average of 85% at baseline to an average of 91% of the time on-task during the last five weeks of the study. See figure 3.

Student Praise Survey Results

Towards the end of the study all of the students in the class were given a Likert style scale survey to identify their feelings about how praise has been used in their classroom and whether or not they feel like praise helps them in the classroom. The directions were explained to students that they were to put how they really felt about praise and that there was no wrong choice. The survey was read aloud to the students by the researcher.

Questions one, two, four and five are all related to how students feel praise helps them to work harder and follow direction in class. Question one asked students if receiving praise statements helps them to follow directions in class, ninety-five percent (95%) of students chose that this was very true for them. This shows that most students feel that praise helps them to follow directions. Question two asked students if receiving praise helped them to work harder in class, 57% of students chose very true, and 38% of student chose sort of true. For the students in the class praise does help them to work harder, but not as much as it helps them to follow directions. Question four asks if students know they will receive praise from their teacher for working hard does this help them to work harder? For this question 76% of students chose very true and 14% of students marked sort of true. Question five asked if students liked it when their teacher gave them praise, 85% of students chose very true and 10% of students chose sort of true. This shows that for the majority of the students in the class praise is something that they like. For questions one, two, and five only 5% of students chose not very true at all. A very

small amount of students felt that praise does not help them to follow directions or work harder and they do not particularly enjoy it when praise is given to them. See figure 4.

Questions three and six are related to how the students felt when other students in the class received praise. Question three asked if other students receive praise does it help students to follow direction more in class. For this question 57% of the students chose very true, 19% of the students marked sort of true, 14% chose no very true, and 10% of students chose not very true at all. Overall 76% of students marked very true or sort of true and 24% of students marked not very true or not very true at all. For a quarter of the class, when other students receive praise statements the students do not feel like it helps them to follow direction more. Question six asked students if they liked it when other students receive praise. Ninety-five percent (95%) of students chose very true or sort of true. This shows that the majority of the students in the class like it when other students receive praise from the teacher. See figure 4.

Questions seven and eight asked the class about how praise has been used in their classroom lately. Question seven asked the students if they have noticed their teacher using more praise in the afterschool program lately. For this question, 76% of students chose very true and 19% chose sort of true, this is 95% of the students. The majority of the students feel that their teacher has been using more praise lately. Question eight asked the students if they feel the students in their class have been following directions more lately. For this question 52% chose very true and 28% chose sort of true, this is 80% of the student in the class. Therefore, 80% of the students feel that the class has been following directions more. While, 20% of the class chose not very true or not very true at all. These students felt like the class has not been following directions more lately. See figure 4.

Questions nine and ten are related to how students feel praise should be used in general. Question nine asked students if they felt that praise is a good way to get students to follow directions and work hard, 95% of students chose very true or sort of true. The majority of students feel that praise is helpful in getting students to follow direction in the class. Question ten asked students if they felt teachers should use more praise in the classroom, 85% of students chose very true or sort of true. Only 15% of students chose not very true or not very true at all. Again the majority of the students in the class feel that praise should be used more with students. See figure 4.

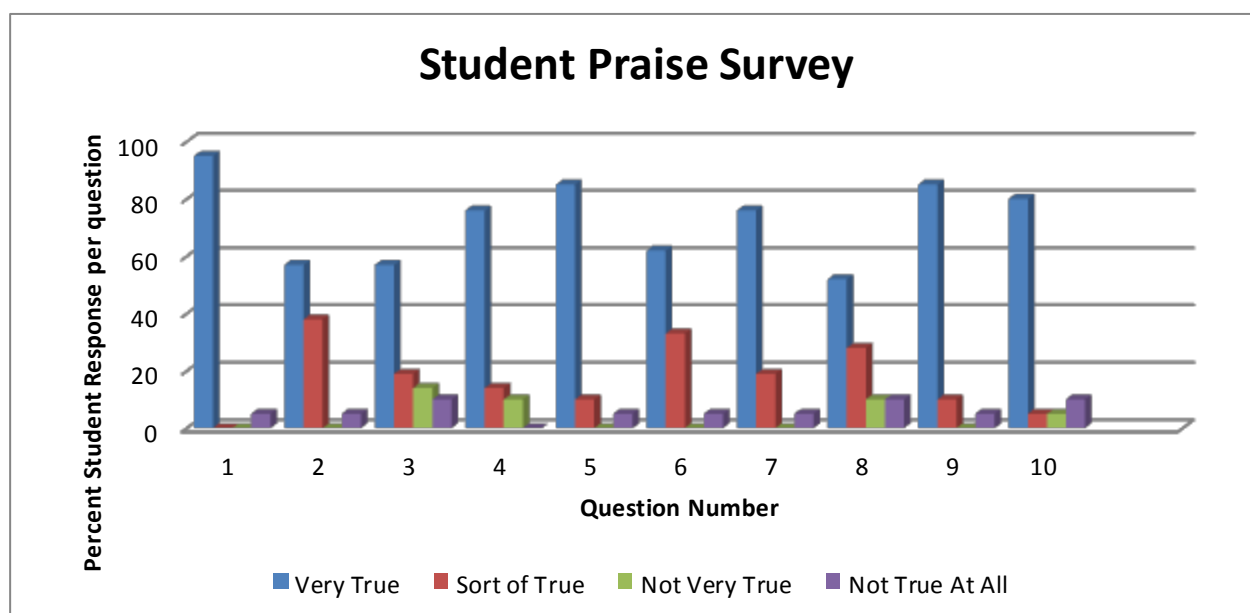


Figure 4. Student Praise Survey Results, bar graph showing the results by each question from the student praise survey.

Focus students

The four focus students were also given the survey about their feelings on how praise is used in school. Focus students one, two, and four all had similar results. For these three students they either chose very true or sort of true for each answer. Only student number four chose not very true for question three, which asked if it helps the student to work hard when the teacher

gives other students praise. Student number three is the student who was the most of task during the baseline data week. The teacher also stated that he really enjoys receiving attention. So, it is possible that he does not like it when other students receive praise because he is not getting the attention. Otherwise, for focus students one, two, and four they feel that praise helps them to follow directions more and work harder. See figure 5. They also have noticed that the students in their after school program class have been behaving more and their teacher has been using more praise lately. Similarly, they feel that teachers should use more praise and praise is a good way to get students to follow directions and work hard.

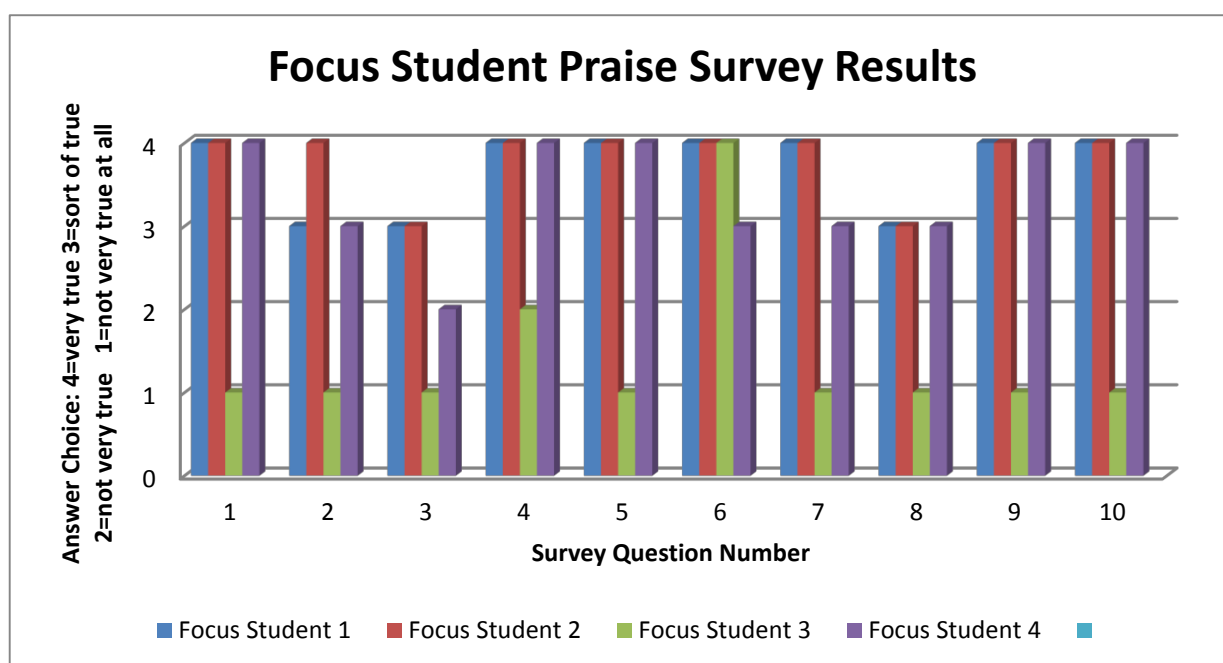


Figure 5. Focus student survey results, bar graph show the answers chosen by each focus student for each question.

Focus student three had interesting survey results. For each of the survey questions he marked not very true at all, except for question six. Question six asked if he likes it when the teacher praises other students. He marked very true for this question. The rest of the questions

were marked not very true at all. See figure 5. From these results it seems this student does not like verbal praise. I spoke with his general education teacher, since she knows him better than his after school teacher. She stated that this student does not like attention. He doesn't want others to notice him. She stated that when he is in her class and she gives him verbal praise he will often put on his hood as if he is trying to hide. She has found that he does respond to non-verbal types of praise, like a sticker on his paper, a hand written good job, or hand written stars on good work.

This information from the survey as well as speaking with his classroom teacher supports the results for the amount of on-task behavior that he displayed during the after school program verses the amount of verbal praise he received from his teacher. When the teacher would praise this student he would become more off-task. On days when the teacher used only one or zero statements this student was more on-task. This demonstrates that praise really needs to be a reinforcing factor for the students (something students want to receive) for it to increase student on-task behavior. If the student does not want to receive praise a student may actually become more off-task.

Summary

Improved teacher training did help the teacher to use more praise in her after school classroom with a focus on students with mild to moderate disabilities. The use of a tally chart was helpful in getting the teacher to start using praise, but after a few weeks she abandoned the self-monitoring tally chart system, but continued to use praise without it. Adding goal reminders and giving the teacher daily feedback did not help the teacher to increase the amount of praise she was using.

The majority of the students including students with mild to moderate disabilities increased the amount of time that was spent on-task during the after school program. From the survey results most of the class enjoyed receiving praise. They marked that praise helped them to follow directions and work harder in class. For them verbal praise is a reinforcing factor. The only student who did not increase his amount of on-task time was focus student number three. This student stated on the survey results that he did not like praise and in speaking with his classroom teacher does not like to have attention drawn to him. So, verbal praise is something that is not reinforcing for him at all, it actually has an opposite effect.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The focus of this study was to answer the research questions: Does specific praise and positive reinforcement help shape the behavior of students who have mild to moderate special education needs in an after school setting? What are the effects of specific praise and positive reinforcement on students who have mild to moderate special education needs in the after school education environment? Does sharing strategies to promote the use of praise with an after school program teacher increase consistent application for students with mild to moderate behavior? Does sharing strategies to promote the use of praise with an after school program teacher increase on task behavior for students with mild to moderate disabilities?

In this chapter I will review the findings that were acquired through the data collection phase. I will propose an action plan for school use and implementation. I will discuss the limitations that arose as the study was being conducted.

Findings

Through completing the research for this study several patterns emerged as the data was analyzed. Both quantitative and qualitative data was gathered to analyze the results. Literature has shown that with improved teacher training teachers will use more praise in their classrooms with students with mild to moderate disabilities (Sutherland K.S. et al., 2000). The data that was collected during the research period of this study is consistent with literature that has previously been written. In this study teacher training did increase the use of teacher praise with students with mild to moderate disabilities in the classroom setting. The volunteering teacher stated that the training that was provided to her was the most important factor in her increasing her praise with all students, but especially students with mild to moderate disabilities. This training

reminded her of the importance of using praise with all students and how often she should be using it.

Research has also found that teacher feedback via graphs of teacher praise statements versus student behavior is another effective way to encourage teachers to use more praise in their classrooms (Mesa et al., 2005). With daily graphic feedback and reminders of the praise use goals that the teacher had created the teacher was able to dramatically increase her use of praise with all students, but especially students with mild to moderate disabilities. This visual feedback and reminders aided the teacher to with more consistency use praise with students who have mild to moderate disabilities and all students in her classroom. Another finding that became clear was that the day of the week may have an effect on the amount of praise the teacher uses. Towards the beginning of each week the teacher used more praise with all types of student, while towards the end of the week the teacher used less praise with all types of students. This is inconsistent with the literature that was reviewed and may need further research.

In many cases students who received praise statements from adults were able to change their negative behaviors to positive behaviors (Germer et al., 2011). The research conducted was consistent with the findings of previous literature. There appears to be a correlation between increased teacher praise and the on-task behavior of all students, including students with mild to moderate disabilities. The study revealed that as the teacher increased her use of behavior specific praise with students with mild to moderate disabilities those students were more on-task during the class sessions. Two of the students began to participate more in class. Prior to increasing the use of teacher praise they were very quiet in class and often did not participate in whole group activities. After the teacher increased her praise by using statements such as “I like the way student number one is doing the motions” or “I can really hear student number two

reading with everyone, very good.” Because of these statements the students’ rate of participation in class increased.

For the majority of students praise is reinforcing and causes students to show more on-task behavior in the classroom setting (Wheatley et al., 2009). Maslow (1954) stated that people have basic needs which should be met before they can focus on other things like learning. One basic need that people have is a desire for acceptance. Giving behavior specific praise is one way to meet this need. Focus student number four was a student, whom as the teacher stated, “Just wants attention.” These types of students will gain attention in any way they can. When the teacher used more praise with this student he became calmer and more focused in the classroom. She was meeting his need for attention and acceptance from the teacher. Once that need was filled he was able to focus and be more on-task during the class sessions. From the student survey the majority of the students including focus students one, two and four, stated that they liked it when the teacher gave them praise and it helped them to do more work in class. They felt teachers should use more praise in classrooms. For these students increasing praise is a useful tool that has assisted them in remaining on-task in the classroom. This finding is very consistent with the research that has been reviewed.

One finding that emerged from the data collected during the research phase showed an inconsistency with the literature that had been examined. For focus student number three, praise was not reinforcing at all. It actually seemed to have to opposite effect. When the teacher would praise this student he would become more off-task by hiding in his hood and sinking down in his chair. The student survey revealed that this student did not like it when praise was given to him. Upon speaking with his general education teacher it was learned that this student does not want attention drawn to him. When using praise as a behavior management tool teachers need to be

aware of students who do not benefit from verbal praise. This study showed that about five percent of the class did not respond well to praise. For praise to be effective it needs to be a reinforcing factor for the student, otherwise it will have the opposite effect. This is an area that warrants further investigation.

Limitations

There are several issues that arose during the course of the study which may have affected the results that were obtained. First, the attendance of one of the students was very low. Focus student number one missed numerous days of school during the six weeks of observation. This may have caused him not to respond to praise as well as the other students because he was not receiving it with any consistency. In addition, the volunteering teacher missed several days of school as well. The teacher was absent for four days out of the twenty-nine teaching days.

Second, the participating teacher is a teacher who already knew a great amount about praise and its beneficial effects on students. The teacher was very willing to use praise in her classroom. Perhaps another teacher with less prior knowledge about praise would have used praise less or needed different supports. Also, a teacher who does not think praise is a valuable behavior management tool might not have used praise as much either. A third limitation is that only one classroom in an after school program was used and there were only four students with mild to moderate disabilities. This was a very small sample size. If the study is to be recreated there should be a larger sample size. Several classrooms or schools should be used. The majority of the students with mild to moderate disabilities in the school should be used in the study. This would give a clearer picture of whether or not increasing teacher training correlated to an increase in the teachers' use of praise, because more teachers and students would be used. Fourth, there was only one observer (the researcher) collecting observational data for this study.

The researcher is a person who really believes praise helps students to remain on-task in the classroom setting. This personal bias could have skewed the results to show students being more on-task than they really were and the teacher using more praise than she actually did.

Lastly, the teacher did not feel she had the time to keep a short daily journal about her praise statements. This could have been important information to the teacher insights, concerns, questions, and feelings towards using praise in her classroom. The teacher and the researcher did meet weekly to discuss the teachers praise use so some of her feelings were gathered from the meetings.

Action Plan

The study has reinforced the importance of using behavior specific praise with students of all abilities in a classroom setting. The central next step is to inform teachers about the results of the study and other research that has been previously completed. Next, to ensure teachers implement behavior specific praise in the classroom, quality teacher training is vital. Lastly, follow up trainings will be important to have continued support and feedback for teachers. This would be an important component of a school wide Positive Behavior Intervention Support (PBIS) plan (Wheatley et al., 2009).

Implementation

In order to relay the results of the study to the staff at my school and the school of the volunteering teacher it is first essential to speak with the principal of each school. During the meeting the results of the study will be reviewed. In addition, the importance of using positive reinforcement as part of a school wide Positive Behavior Support and Intervention plan will be discussed. The schools in the district are required to have this type of plan, but not all schools are sufficiently implementing this plan. Speaking with principals and asking to discuss the

results of this study and train teachers in using behavior specific praise will give principals an opportunity to fully implement a PBIS plan within their school site.

Once approval has been given from the principals the next step is to train the teachers at the school. The district has weekly staff meeting time allocated. This time can be used to train the teachers at each school site. The training that will be used will be the same training that was used in this study. The teachers will be informed of the results of this study and studies that have already been conducted. Behavior specific praise will be explained to the teachers. The amount of praise that should be used with certain students will be clarified. Then there will be examples of behavior specific praise and an opportunity to practice using behavior specific praise. Correspondingly the teachers will be asked to choose target students from their class. These target students should include students with special needs and students who have had behavior challenges in the past. Lastly, the teachers will be trained in using a simple tally chart for the amount of praise they use with the focus student. At the next weeks staff meeting there will be a follow up session to see what successes and challenges the teachers had during the week with using behavior specific praise. The teachers will have an opportunity to have a conversation with each other about their praise use and ask any questions to the presenter.

Once the training and follow up meetings have occurred it is important to have an additional meeting with the principal. At this meeting the principal can reveal if they have noticed a decrease in behavior problems since the implementation of behavior specific praise with all students in the school. Also, other parts of a PBIS plan can be discussed and possibly implemented in the future, such as: character training for all students, more intensive social skills training for targeted students, and some sort of tangible rewards system for all student, that at the same time support the use of behavior specific praise with teachers and all school staff. Doing

these activities will help the schools involved become a more positive place for everyone involved.

Summary/Conclusion

Behavior specific praise is a powerful classroom management tool that teachers often underutilize (Wheatley et al., 2009). Teachers do need more training to be aware of how to use behavior specific praise consistently and appropriately. They also need training so that they are conscious of the benefits of behavior specific praise (Duchaine et al., 2011). This study has reinforced the importance of increasing behavior specific praise with all students, but especially students with mild to moderate disabilities. It is important to remind teachers to consistently praise students with mild to moderate disabilities in the classroom.

Through doing action research and a literature review the importance of using behavior specific praise in the classroom with all students is very clear. For the majority of students there is a strong correlation between increased behavior specific praise and the students' amount of increased on-task behavior (Chalk et al. 2004). The study did reveal that for a very few students, behavior specific praise may have the opposite effect. Some students do not want attention to be drawn to them. Verbal praise draws attention to them and causes them to want to hide and become off-task. Teachers must be aware of these students in their classrooms and find which behavior management systems work best for each individual student.

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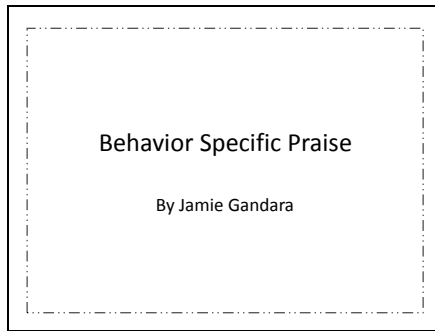
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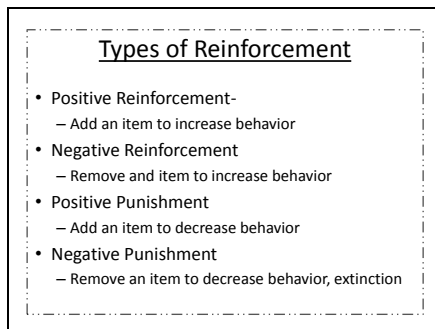
Appendix A:

Power point training presentation

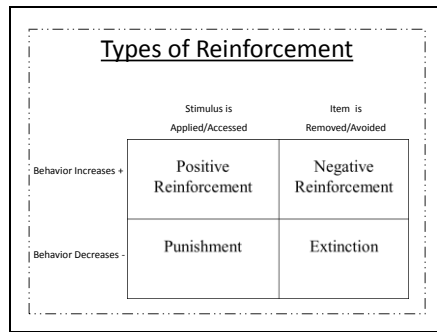
Slide 1



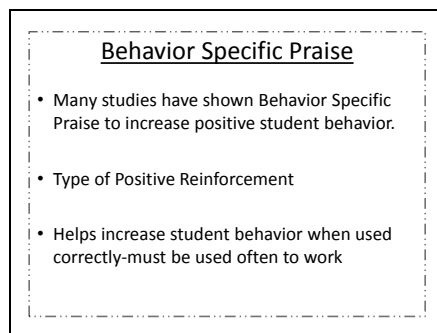
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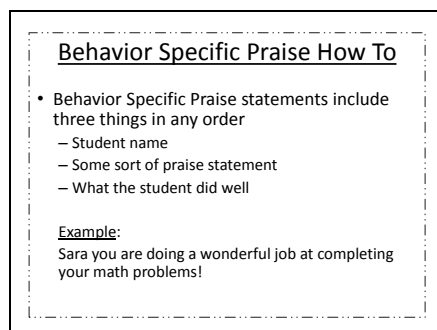
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Slide 4



Slide 5



Slide 6

Ways to Praise 😊

- Awesome
- Great job
- Beautiful
- Amazing
- Wonderful
- I like the way you..
- I can't believe how well you....
- You did a kind thing when....
- Everyone look at what _____ did.
- You are getting really good at
- You got more right than you ever did before!
- You ask all the right questions.
- Way to go
- Wow

Slide 7

Lets Practice Behavior Specific Praise

- Use a Behavior Specific Praise statement for each example
- BSP: Name, praise statement, explanation
 - Bill sat quietly in his chair with his feet on the floor, hand still on his desk, and looking at the teacher for three minutes.
 - Sally completed three math problems correctly.
 - Joe said thank you when another student picked up his pencil.

Slide 8

Self Monitoring Behavior Specific
Praise

- Chose focus students
- Make a Behavior Specific Praise Goal
- Tall chart How to

Slide 9

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Appendix B:

Teacher Self-Monitoring Tally Chart

| Date: Week 1 | 3/2/2015 | 3/3/2015 | 3/4/2015 | 3/5/2015 | 3/6/2015 |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Student #1 | | | | | |
| Student #2 | | | | | |
| Student #3 | | | | | |
| Student #4 | | | | | |
| Class: Any Student | | | | | |

| Date: Week 2 | 3/9/2015 | 3/10/2015 | 3/11/2015 | 3/12/2015 | No School |
|--------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Student #1 | | | | | |
| Student #2 | | | | | |
| Student #3 | | | | | |
| Student #4 | | | | | |
| Class: Any Student | | | | | |

Appendix C:
Student Behavior Observation Form*

Target Student _____ M/F _____ Grade _____

School _____ Teacher _____ Date _____

Observer _____ Position _____

Classroom Activity _____

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| Target Student | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Peer | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Target Student | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Peer | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Target Student | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Peer | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Target Student | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Peer | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Target Student | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Peer | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Directions: Each box represents 10 seconds. Observe student and mark whether they are on task or off task for that 10 second period. At the same time compare the target student to a same age peer in the class. The entire chart represents 15 minutes.

On Task=Eyes looking at teacher and/or performing required task.

Off Task Codes: T=Talking O=Out of seat N=Noncompliance P=Playing with object I=Inactive

*Form Adapted from The Tough Kids Tool Box (Jenson, W. R, et al., 1994)

Appendix D:

Weekly: Teacher Praise Statement Frequency Observation

| Date: Week 1 | 2/23/2015 | | 2/24/2015 | | 2/25/2015 | |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | BSP | Non BSP | BSP | Non BSP | BSP | Non BSP |
| Student #1 | | | | | | |
| Student #2 | | | | | | |
| Student #3 | | | | | | |
| Student #4 | | | | | | |
| Gen Ed Student #1 | | | | | | |
| Gen Ed Student #2 | | | | | | |

| Date: Week 1 | 2/27/2015 | | 2/27/2015 | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|-----|---------|
| | BSP | Non BSP | BSP | Non BSP | BSP | Non BSP |
| Student #1 | | | | | | |
| Student #2 | | | | | | |
| Student #3 | | | | | | |
| Student #4 | | | | | | |
| Gen Ed Student #1 | | | | | | |
| Gen Ed Student #2 | | | | | | |

Appendix E: Student SurveyStudent Praise Survey

Name: _____

Directions: Listen to the each statement as it is read aloud. Answer each statement as best you can.

1. When the teacher gives me praise, it helps me to follow directions more in class.
a. very true b. sort of true c. not very true d. not true at all
2. When the teacher gives me praise, it helps me to work harder in class.
a. very true b. sort of true c. not very true d. not true at all
3. When the teacher gives other students praise, it helps me to follow directions more in class.
a. very true b. sort of true c. not very true d. not true at all
4. I work harder when I know my teacher will say nice things about me.
a. very true b. sort of true c. not very true d. not true at all
5. I like it when my teacher gives me praise for following directions and working hard.
a. very true b. sort of true c. not very true d. not true at all
6. I like it when the teacher praises other students for following directions and working hard.
a. very true b. sort of true c. not very true d. not true at all
7. I have noticed my teacher, in the after school program, using more praise lately.
a. very true b. sort of true c. not very true d. not true at all
8. The students in my afterschool program class have been following directions more lately.
a. very true b. sort of true c. not very true d. not true at all
9. Praise is a good way to get students to follow directions and work hard.

- a. very true b. sort of true c. not very true d. not true at all

10. Teachers should use more praise in the classroom.

- a. very true b. sort of true c. not very true d. not true at all

Appendix F: Teacher InterviewTeacher Post Study Interview

1. What has helped you to use more praise in your afterschool program?

2. What challenges have you found when trying to use more praise?

3. How do you feel when you use more praise in the classroom?

4. Do you notice increased praise working in increasing the on task behavior of students with special needs?

5. Do you notice increased praise working in increasing the on task behavior of general education students?

6. What would help you to keep using more praise in your after school classroom?